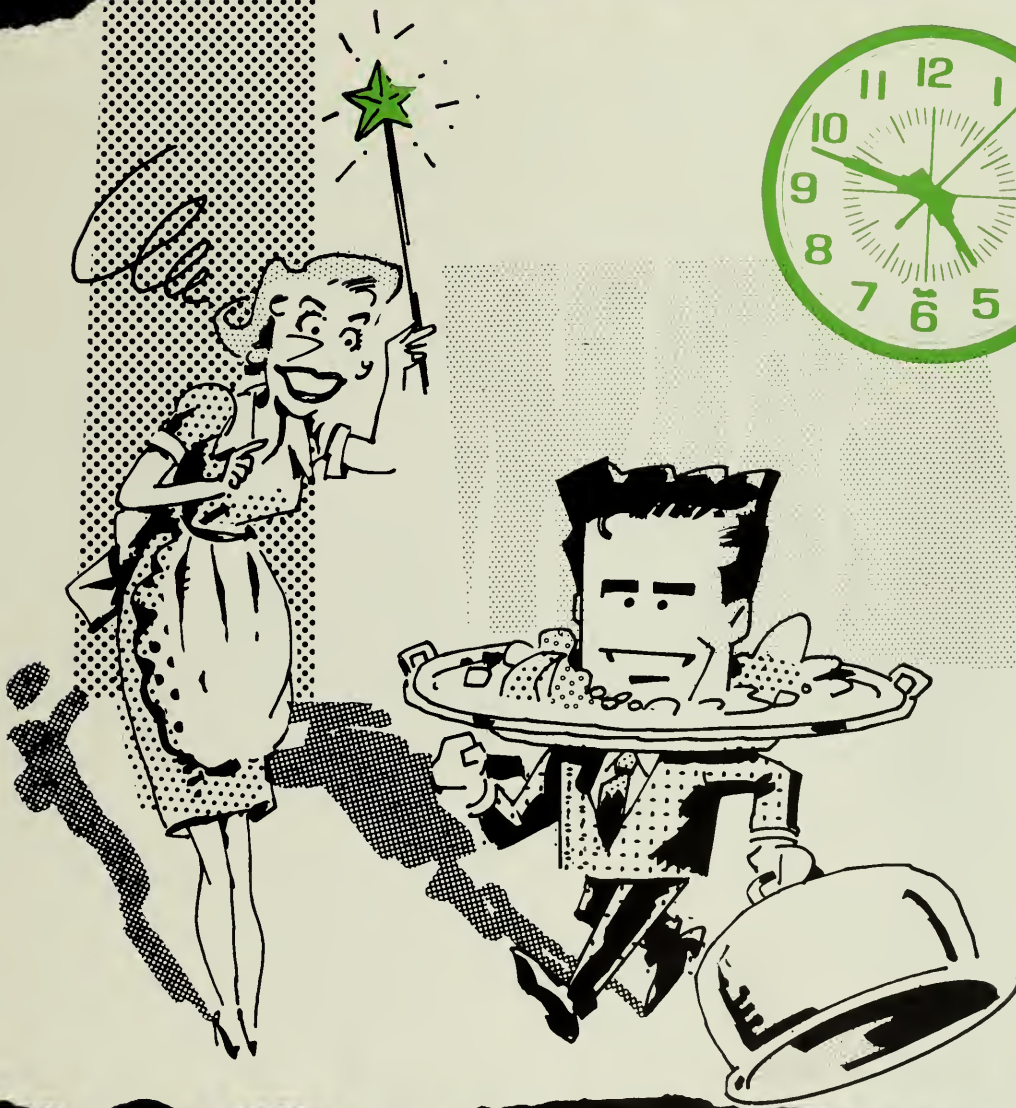


# PROCESSED WORLD 15



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## BIG PROCESSED FOOD ISSUE!



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# PROCESSED WORLD

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**CREDITS:** Primitivo Morales, Pauline Slug, Linda Thomas, Ana Logue, Dennis Hayes, Emily, Lucius Cabins, Paxa Lourde, Maxine Holz, Zoe Noe, Med-O, Louis Michaelson, D.S. Black, Friends of the Toad, Myra Way, Steve C., The Big Mud Duck, Clayton Sheridan, Bevel, Michelle L.P., and many others...

"The Magazine  
With A Bad Attitude"

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# Talking Heads

Processed World has changed enormously over the four and a half years since it began. Many of the changes seem entirely positive. We've gained a lot of skill in editing and production. We tackle a wider range of subjects. Our circulation has risen—and broadened; we now reach most European countries (including Poland and the USSR) as well as Australia, Malaysia and the Antilles. *PW* articles have been reprinted in eight or more foreign languages. We've been written up in all kinds of publications both local and national. In short, we present at least the appearance of a "professional" alternative magazine with a growing international reputation.

In an important sense, though, the magazine has gone in a different direction than the one its founders intended. *PW* was to be a meeting point for dissatisfied and rebellious workers in the "new" technical and service sectors, a place where they could vent their frustrations and share their dreams. So far, so good. But we wanted to go beyond frustration-venting and dream-sharing to help develop strategies for organized resistance at work. We wanted the rebellion to become *practical*.

In 1980-1981, this didn't look so farfetched. Revolt was in the air—over the draft, nuclear power, pollution. Punk had galvanized many young people (including us) with its stylish anti-style and fuck-you attitude. Major efforts were underway by various unions (SEIU, Local 925, etc.) to organize private-sector office workers. More important, there were underground "independent unions" and employee networks in several large corporations. But as the Right got a firmer grip on the mass media and as the recession hit, terrorizing millions of workers into submission, the revolt largely faded away. Today, an atmosphere of anxious subservience, thinly veiled in born-again patriotism and consumption-mania, pervades daily life.

With office work in particular, the problem goes even deeper. *PW* has always distinguished its "take" on workplace organizing from more traditional approaches by pointing out that most work in the modern office is *at best* useless in terms of real human needs, and at worst (as with real-estate, banking, and nuclear and military contracting) actively destructive. Rebel office workers, sensing this, *don't identify with their work*. They generally change jobs often and work as little as possible. Their revolt takes the form of on-the-job *disorganizing*—absenteeism, disinformation, sabotage. They seldom view as worthwhile either the risk or the effort involved in creating a workers' self-defense organization. Moreover, rightly or wrongly, they believe that most workers, who identify more with their jobs, also identify with management. As a result, the rebels tend to be as alienated from their co-workers as they are from the boss.

Perhaps this is why *PW*'s extensive discussions of autonomous office-worker organizing seem to fall largely on deaf ears—while its frequent references to sabotage have made it notorious. Nevertheless, we are pursuing our interest in collective worker resistance with two articles in this issue—*Fire Against Ice*, which describes how a previously passive workforce of immigrant women at two frozen food plants have fought back with their own organization against management, the law, and the dead weight of "their" union, and *Road Warriors/Road Worriers*, which analyzes the conditions faced by New York bike messengers and discusses their attempts at change.

Still, any real mass upsurge seems far away. In that case, isn't *PW* in danger of marketing the image of a non-existent revolt to be passively consumed by its reader-contributors? Perhaps. But we think that even in the absence of real revolt, *PW* is helping to create the cultural preconditions for it. Again and again, readers tell us: "I thought I was the only person who felt this way. Now I know I'm not alone." One of *PW*'s principal aims is to make people feel *good* about hating their jobs, not to mention despising the dullness and ugliness of so much of life in general. Hence our continuing focus on nightmarish visions of that life, expressed in this issue in *925 Crawl*, a journey through the office world's Heart of Darkness, and *Montgomery Street Morning*, in which a young worker looks twice at the ragged casualties hitting him up for spare change, with eerie results. The isolation and alienation of the lone office rebel are also powerfully described in *The Temp*, reviewed here in *Remembrance of a Temp Past*.

*PW* has always maintained that, beyond a culture of resistance and some organized self-defense against corporate and governmental power, we need a complete reinvention of the social world. This reinvention can begin, in imagination at least, from almost any aspect of contemporary reality. Thus *Dear Del Monte*, which starts out as a hilarious account of work in the complaints department of a food processing company, concludes with a vision of how our relationship to producing food—and thus to the land itself—might be transformed. Our other book review in this issue, *Chainsaws and CRT's*, picks up on the same theme in its discussion of *Ecodefense*, a handbook of "monkey-wrenching," direct-action techniques for defending our remaining wilderness against the likes of Crown Zellerbach.

Finally, it comes down to this. Through *PW*, we try to assert lucid imagination against Rambo-style reactionary fantasy, true diversity against careerist "individualism," free solidarity against authoritarian fake community, nameless wildness against well-organized death. This helps us to survive a bleak time. We hope it does the same for you. Together, perhaps, we can achieve a lot more. Write us.

# LETTERS



Drawings by Michael Bantusa

## Notes From The High Heeled Feminist

Let's get a few things straight. For one thing, there is nothing wrong with being sexy (albeit, if the High Heeled Feminist has to look at one more picture of Ms. Madonna she is going to vomit). Repressed sexuality is, in my humble opinion, one of the prime causes of sexism.

The H.H.F. is, I admit, somewhat fortunate in the fact that the office in which she works enforces no dress code. The H.H.F. has been known on occasion to show up to work in slit skirts and skin tight stirrup pants. Whereas this mode of attire may be perfectly acceptable on the dance floor, it can produce very subliminal traces of nervousness among the H.H.F.'s male co-workers. But, thank God, it doesn't elicit the thinly guised flirtations one witnesses in the elevator among the well dressed set.

Three piece suits seem to effect the corporate hormones in a very peculiar way. Business persons who work from nine to five exist in a very definite time structure and tend to organize their social life accordingly. They make initial contact during business hours, negotiate over lunch and close the contract after five. Business becomes pleasure and vice versa. The H.H.F. thinks this is all a piece of 20% polyester wool blend pocket lint.

I mean, how can anyone start a meaningful relationship over the clickety clack of the archaic typewriter and the gratifying, yet sterile, exchange between the worker and the word processor. Hey, the H.H.F. is a modern girl and know how alluring those peripheral devices can be (look forward to my next essay on the computer widow).

But getting back on the subject, it seems that overt sexuality threatens the white

male superiority complex more than corporate feminism. Is it because women who celebrate their sexual differences are considered to be stupid and therefore unacceptable as coworkers, or is it simply that those wool tweeds and starched collars leave so much more to the imagination (the H.H.F. is, incidentally, in total agreement with Michelle La Place's article "The Dead-End Game of Corporate Feminism" that graced the pages of *Processed World* #7).

Then again, the woman who plays the man's game of 'dress for success' may just be a higher trophy of conquest. What the white male superiority complex really yearns for is complete female subordination on all levels of the corporate ladder (the H.H.F. admits to generalizing shamelessly; Yes, Virginia they're all a bunch of poodle butts).

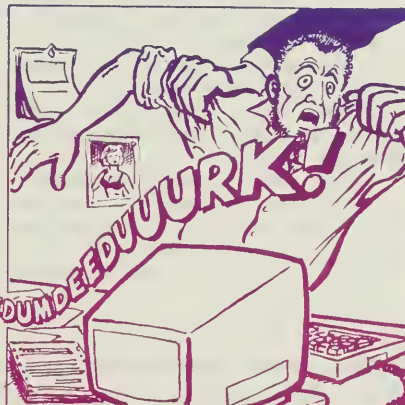
Now don't get me wrong, the H.H.F. does not go out of her way to dress provocatively to exploit her figure. Au contraire, the H.H.F. is painfully (it only



HERE AT CONTEK, WE KNOW JOB LOSS CAN CAUSE TRAUMA. WE'VE COME UP WITH A NEW SOLUTION. WE CALL IT...

## EXIT THERAPY

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hurts when I laugh) aware of the fact that she has no figure to exploit in the first place (I'm in favor of androgyny, actually, I even asked for a gender blender for Christmas, but I got a Cuisinart instead). No, the H.H.F. dresses as if she were on the dance floor because that is bloody well where she would rather be.

What it all boils down to is a question of self expression and being able to be yourself in all walks of life no matter who or what you are (albeit if the H.H.F. has to look at one more picture of Ms. Cyndi Lauper she is going to vomit; look forward to my upcoming essay on women in corporate rock) without having to be exposed to those "acceptable levels" of sexism that can be oh so tiresome. I mean, haven't we all got more important things to occupy our mental energy on? Until next time...

Love and anarchy,  
The High Heeled Feminist

Dear PW,

As a single feminist, I must admit when I read both articles on motherhood in #14 I was prepared to be annoyed. However, they turned out to be quite reasonable and very well written. There was none of that we-biological-mothers-are-superior air that I have sometimes personally encountered.

Though childless myself, I feel that parenthood and co-equal parenting are central issues that in one way or another affect every woman and man. I myself quite proudly belong to two family-centered, anti-interventionist alternative birthing and childcare groups.

I remember several years ago at work one real princess type shrieked at me "You can talk if you ever have any children" when I dared to put my two cents in about overly clinical, high tech maternity care. As it was she was very machine and male-doctor-god oriented, but my views were the ones vindicated some years later. I wonder what she thinks of co-equal parenting.

Anyway, I hope someday you have articles by single women without children



who are also doing their thing to fight this over-technologized, over-homogenized world we live in.

As extended family, we contribute too.  
Auntie Mimi—Merion Stn., PA

Dear PW,

Something just crystallized in my mind today:

I have long been stuck for an answer when people ask me the embarrassing question, "Are you working?" Now it has finally occurred to me that their reason for asking can be broken down into four different components:

1) They want to know if I'm filling my time with some satisfying, "productive" activity like an adult is supposed to do;

2) They want to know if I have enough money to make ends meet;

3) They want to know if I'm being a "liberated woman" and earning my own paycheck;

4) They want to know if I'm conforming to the puritan work ethic for its own sake (i.e. "Doing work you hate is good for you") which they've been conditioned to accept as gospel. This attitude is especially prevalent in Boston.

I think people's reason for asking that question is usually a combination of all four

of these, but I'd have a different answer for each one:

1) I *might* be able to if people like you would get off my back!

2) Yes, I live with a postal employee who makes \$20,000 a year.

3) No. My definition of feminism includes a *rejection* of the patriarchal money system. Your definition of feminism discriminates against housewives.

4) No, and I never could and never will!!! I'm not a masochist!!

Some of these answers may seem to contradict each other and sound hypocritical, and the "liberated woman" part is the stickiest. Oh well—I don't have it all figured out yet, but I'll keep working on it.

Incidentally, you can use my full name... Bridget Reilly isn't even my "real" name, and certainly not the one anyone else in SF knew me by. I only invented it after I moved to Boston. I had found that "passing for Irish" was a very handy way to get around in this part of the country. Heh, heh, heh!)

Love, Bridget—Boston

Dear PW,

Jake hit on a *very* common theme for women of our day in "Sweet Relief" [PW #13]. I know there is boredom and fantastical hopes involved in what seems the flow of life out there.

I have spent my entire summer concentrating on my mind while my body has remained alienated from others. No sex in two months and the men that come on don't turn me on. Food obsessions provide sensational pleasure; and as a recovering anorexic-bulimiac I know the eat and eat and be thin conflict. It is a social problem for which women must develop alternatives.

Affirming that the curvature of flesh is admirable. Demonstrating the supportive and accepting friendships formed by groups of committed women.

Thanks for addressing the issue,  
Sweet Visions

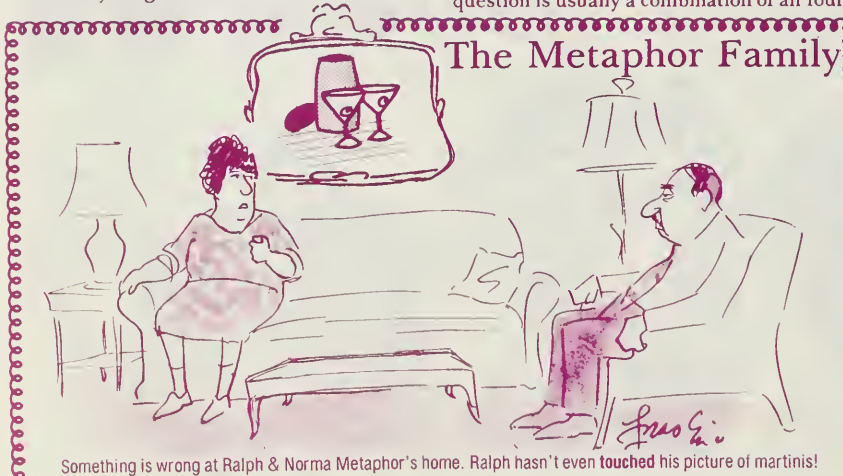
Dear PW:

Your magazine has been a source of profound joy for me since I discovered it with PW #6. It's good to know there are other alienated androids out there, and that some of them are thinking of alternative futures.

I have a "good job" as a word processor with Bank of America. Everyone at BofA these days is talking about cutting the "fat and waste" out of our operating expenses, and making the organization more "efficient and productive."

This translates as: Hire too few employees to handle the workload, don't spend the necessary funds to give them the right tools, make them come in early, work all day without breaks, then ask them to stay late and come in on weekends too.

As the only word processing operator



Something is wrong at Ralph & Norma Metaphor's home. Ralph hasn't even touched his picture of martinis!

serving approximately 20 managers, I'm constantly having jobs shoved in front of my face, invariably classified RUSH or URGENT. Each manager feels that his/her job is more important than anyone else's, that whatever I'm doing now should be dropped immediately so theirs can be done right away.

In contrast with my last job, where the managers always made sure the operators took scheduled coffee and lunch breaks, nobody ever asks if you've had lunch yet at BofA. The prevailing feeling here is "there's too much work to go to lunch." To stop work at any time for any reason is just not part of the company spirit.

Most of these documents are of surprisingly little substance. Vague narratives about the need to develop new products and improve profits, in which great attention is focused on fancy, artistic formatting, but which contain no real 'meat and potatoes' ideas on how to achieve these goals are continuously churned out for endless 'presentations.' Ideas which could easily be expressed with a couple of paragraphs of simple text are turned into complex charts and diagrams. My constant pleading for equipment better suited to these special, difficult formats are always turned down because they would cost too much at a time when "we really need to cut our expenses," yet my department changed its name four times in the six months, a very expensive process, since all the stationery, e.g., letterhead, business cards, note pads, etc. bearing the old department name must be destroyed and new ones printed.

Never have I worked anyplace where everyone is so frantically busy and working so hard at doing nothing!

I'd personally love to distribute PW and help sow dissent among the other workers at the orifice, but I find it's very difficult to have any conversations with anyone at BofA about important things, like values, politics or alternative lifestyles. Seems everyone is really paranoid about losing their jobs, so the conversation is limited to mundane talk about the weather, sports, how busy everyone is, or plans for the weekend.

I do my job well, I guess, since I'm one of the very few employees who didn't get laid off despite my junior status in a recent series of departmental budget cuts. Nobody seems to suspect that inside I'm seething with boredom and secretly subscribe to *Processed World*.

As with everyone else at PW, the paycheck keeps me from being another one of the homeless, sleeping on heating grates, and lets me have a little spare time and money to do things I consider worthwhile.

I would love to hear from anyone at PW who has creative ideas for alternatives to the corporate orifice drag, especially more about worker owned collectives, or har-

nessing computer and automation technology in the interests of the people, to eliminate boring, mundane work for humans and create a society of abundance and 100% unemployment for everyone.

Sincerely,  
J.F.

Dear PW,

Well alright #14, special theme, graphic possibilities, and trials 'n tribulations... hmmm... Anyway, thank you 4 sending the *World* and of course i love it 4 the hope it suggests. But you must realize that what is being discussed is *not* the process(ion) away from capital or state socialist bondage. Yes, indeed the process of raising consciousness is of course the essence of change...and yet the sad truth is that one does not do something by merely talking about it. Especially the matter of making one's misery public—which also serves to sensitize the naive to a repertoire of repercussions. Well you might ask: What future?? And, the repeated reifications regarding the creation of alternatives cannot be realized with the conventions of symbolic/semi-resisters (i.e. "this ain't no party. This ain't no disco."). To really begin "developing positive solutions" it is necessary to comprehend the problem—in this case, bondage *and* addiction to the commodities and accoutrements of materialism. However, for the matter of movement comes those considerations regarding motives and objectives. NO mass psychotherapy nor consciousness raising will suffice to achieve anything but collectivization, in which case the criticism of a "tyranny of the working class" will become grimly evident (those of you with camp, military or prison experience may recall what such organizations engender). And this was/iz the point of the observation that even such as you exemplify and display those mannerisms or characteristics of the authoritarian. The point iz to realize that however creative/cleverly communicated exhortations to awaken and live a life in celebration of spontaneity—it will not *actually* happen until the choice and movements are made—the reinforcements of a status quo are more familiar and consistent. And the dictum "Arbeit Macht

White Flag #2

Rimbaud vs. Rambo

Brutal Pen  
Slashes words barking  
Across the jungle  
Goddammit ruining the point.

Linda Thomas

Frei" is nonetheless what the procession is all about—no "invention," just realizations that some 'things' about the urbane proletariat are constant. No matter the size or color the magazines it is still instruction/inducement to conform... But do tell us more!

Onward with Love,  
Obiter Dictum  
Folsom Prison

Hello to those of *Processed World*,

Here I sit listening to the sound of jack-hammers and non-operational air-cooling units. The terminal faces the door side of the "laundry." Moldering red brick, slightly sway-backed sides, reinforced by steel rods and plates bolted together; primer grey steel bars set into sandstone with a wire mesh overlay. The printer is playing its grating tune with tiny whistles and beeps interspersed to keep me from forgetting; it is just a machine. I munch a carrot in between sentences and wish I had brought more to this chamber of electronic deliberation. "Deliberation".... This thought is one I hesitate to examine.

According to the dictionary: Liberate = To set free, as from oppression, confinement, or foreign control. Deliberate = 1. a. Planned in advance: premeditated. b. Said or done intentionally. 2. Careful and thorough in deciding or determining. 3. Leisurely or slow in motion or manner.

So, here I sit, in this room of careful consideration, premeditated intentions and plenty of background noise. Conversations in New Yorkese rolling across the voids between terminals. Chicago adds another dimension. Why, I ask the CRT, is deliberation not an obvious opposite of liberation? Why is this word, an obvious negation, buried behind a meaning of propriety and thoughtfulness? Inflate:deflate; encode:decode; insist:desist; embark:debar;....liberate:deliberate.....

So, here I sit, carefully, premeditatedly, sometimes leisurely and sometimes not, consciously—de-liberating—myself by the act of interacting with this techno-object.

It is not uncommon to watch prisoners sit in front of these screens and de-liberate themselves into an oblivious state. One in which time and motion take on secondary or almost unconscious tertiary relations. The eyes become a bit glazed from the green hue of the display, instructions pass from one terminal to another by word of mouth and the eyes never leave the screen, as if the ability to speak is granted by its





very greenness..

On occasion, a person, or thing, or being of limited consciousness and often less conscience, will enter and yell a name into the midst of the glazed expressions. Repressed hostility, behind green eyes, flaunted without care at the being who dares interrupt this de-liberating process. A servant of the state is left with a foul taste, always, when he/she interrupts or intrudes upon this process. The servants have no way of understanding. They have little knowledge or ability to interact with the CRT and fear it; an extension of the fear of those in communication with it. "Communicants." We, who sit here before you, are communicants. We are communing our deliberation across the synapses and into the plastic keys to the locks on the transfers to the box with the fan in it and the little thing that looks like a record.

At what point does de-liberation become liberation? At what point does knowledge and the desire to know become a deliberating process? Habilitate:dehabilitate.....

The little box with the fan spins the current around and sends it back to the CRT. I look at it and know that I did it deliberately. It was planned, not spontaneous, studied and ordered pressing of the keys that has placed me deep within this green space. No peace, just space. Ripping through the a-noon like some kind of plague without a victim and starving for a resting spot, my thoughts are caught like a speck of dust in a cross wind. Shot with anxiety, knowing the time is approaching for separation from this electrical reflector of our own remorse. Yes, I did say remorse. Well, O.K., write—not—say.... But I did say it to myself. Honest. I can hear it very plainly. As clearly as I watch my fingers trip across them. Yes, trip... and watch. Not always, but enough so that it is noticeable to a real typist. I'll never make it as a data person. I'll never be a real keyboard racer. I always have to look. I mean, why not, they're just right there, one little glance away.

The beings that represent the State are busily readying themselves to disconnect us from our communal attractions. We, the communicants, are beginning to fidget in our seats. Our sweaty bottoms stuck to the chairs' plastic covers; my shorts tangled in my crotch from constant shifting in the chair. The rush for last minute print-outs is on. Like a small orgasm, one can feel the relief that sighs through the room as one after another finds that—there was just enough time to have the printout run. Without the printout, a small form of terror would grow. With the printout, vast things are possible. A little piece of the de-liberation is carried away, back to the cell. The beings of the State will look at them and squint their eyes (in wonder and think terrible things about these rumina-

tions on paper with holes on the sides.

Blank staring eyes and dead screens show themselves as nothing more than that, dead screens. Only the faces of the communicants, their lips curled back from their recent separation, reveals the pain beneath the scowls. We file out the door towards the cells and the inevitable counting of our bodies. Always being counted for something. Always.....

We have been separated from our deliberations by the iniquities of a State, that doesn't realize just how immersed in our communing we have become. Why must we be separated? We could de-liberate so much better if we could take the eye and the keyboard to the cell with us. Is there a way out of here through the eye? The beings of the State seem to watch us so strangely when we work here and commune in green.

Do you await your time of electrical communing as if there was just a bit more involved than pressing keys and arranging data?

The sun is approaching the dim position and the barred windows are lost in shadow. I must turn away from the screen. I must do it. Or else, or else, I won't be allowed to commune with it later.

L.W. — Leavenworth Penitentiary, KS



Dear PW,

Congratulations on your new format. We are adding you to our "recommended reading" section. It's encouraging to see that not everyone has fallen into the blind acceptance of modern technology trap.

Since January of 1984, we have been attempting to convey to people the concept of technology used AGAINST the individual through a monthly newsletter called 2600. Such developments as electronic switching systems, which are able to compile quite a bit of data on each of us by recording what numbers we call and when; FBI lists; credit data that paints a very pretty picture of our lifestyles; and so on. We also believe that each and every one of us has every right to know EXACTLY what this technology is being used for and how it works. We print this information because we want our readers to keep thinking and asking questions.

We had a computer bulletin board system; it wasn't hard for the authorities to confiscate it and use the excuse that it was being used to move satellites in the sky! Incredible but true. This lack of understanding can be and has been used to hurt us and it will get much worse if we don't keep our wits about us.

If any of your readers have any advice for us or would like to read what we've been saying, our address is 2600, Box 752, Middle Island, NY 11953.

Sincerely,  
The Folks at 2600  
(516) 751-2600

Dear PW,

I have been reading PW since the first issue and I thought that #14 was the best so far. I definitely prefer the expanded size which allows for more lengthy articles and more thorough discussion. This issue demonstrated the merits of a magazine with vague, unspecified parameters. Where else could I find articles about Lego politics, office politics at Hewlett-Packard, and poetry all in the same binding? You will always attract a wide and energetic circle of correspondents as long as you continue to print bold articles like "Equal Opportunity Parents: Just How Equal Can We Be?"

In particular, I was drawn to F.L.'s letter and the debate it provoked within PW. She raised some points that were carefully avoided by most of your responses: that the authoritarian structure of our society "is only symptomatic of the real problem... individuals have insulated themselves from the mess that it is in." Most leftists do not want to hear that, and would like to ignore the fact that "the Masses," ourselves included, are actively complicit with the authoritarian social structure.

In response to this point, (that most people are indiscriminate slaves to any ideology that will "liberate" them from having to make decisions and bearing responsibility for the consequences), Louis Michaelson says F.L. is "blaming the victim." Med-o says "it's all too clear that the primary cause of our misery is international capitalism, both corporate and state sponsored." Ana Logue agrees: "For it is capitalism itself and its reduction of life to the pursuit of profit that is the cause of our dissatisfaction."

None of the writers from PW chose to investigate the implications of what F.L. was really saying: that most of us act irrationally (not in our own best interests) and that it is the character structure of the average person that forms the strongest basis for authoritarian societies.

You cannot impose freedom on people who are shaken to the core with fear of freedom.

There is, to be sure, a symbiotic relationship between capitalism and the people who are "sold on it." However, any theory about objective conditions and their effects on my life which robs me of my responsibility for my own situation is pointless. We all share an unconscious desire to be led out of our misery rather than making the decisions necessary to change it ourselves, and accept the consequences.

Med-o touched upon the undercurrent of psychology bound up in this issue. But his sarcasm betrayed his contempt for sexuality: "I guess all we need is mass psychotherapy to set things straight."

We don't want to understand the roots of irrational behavior. We need to grasp those roots before we can hope to rationalize social power.



Recently I discovered a technique of critical thinking called "character analysis" developed by Wilhelm Reich. Character analysis involves breaking through the patient's social facade and chronic muscle tension with the goal of achieving a unity between inner emotions and outward expression. This is the flip side of Marx's conception of "alienation."

People who are in sexual stasis over a period of years develop chronic neurosis, that is, they cling to an irrational set of behaviors. A boy who is circumcised at birth by those to whom he looks for love and guidance does *not* develop a castration "fantasy," he lives in real, paralyzing fear that he will be attacked in the genitals. Thus adults accustom themselves to an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness and impotence, both socially and sexually. I don't want to stick my balls out.

The neurosis is fed literally from dammed up sexual energy. Sexual gratification—a rare commodity—is replaced with activities that deaden the emotions and weaken the heart: war, pilferage, rape, intellectual specialization and religion. A vicious cycle in which we spin from oppression to repression, never questioning how to get out.

I feel psychic contact with my friends only infrequently. The party chit-chat and worktime bullshitting never seem to scratch beneath the surface of a seething emotional sea. I feel that this lack of contact has something directly to do with the fact that we so rarely taste emotional eruptions along with the attendant risks and satisfactions.

Most people I know privately admit this same frustration. And I also sense an unsaid, unspeakable unhappiness with the state of their love affairs. This fundamental unhappiness of all unhappinesses, loss of sexual power, finds its mirror in our daily political reality: watching fascism reclaim "our country's manhood."

As Med-o points out, we are all disturbed sexually. Girls are raped by their fathers one in four times. Boys are routinely circumcised on a mass scale. The real basis for the subjective misery and isolation we all feel is to be found in our brutalized organs of love. Not only were most of us treated to a cold tit, but we learned to suck it with relish.

The inability to love cuts through every level of public and private life. Love-starved people begin to "numb out" in a variety of ways. We simply cannot tolerate the feeling of tension between our desires and our real situations. We take drugs, enter political groups, obey orders. We are neurotic because we do not want to feel what is happening to us. My penis is scarred, I carry my shield, I fear excitement, it weakens my defenses.

Whether we are in a couple relationship, a *menage a trois*, a promiscuous lifestyle or whatever, most of us will admit a private

# Can You Recognize A TERRORIST?

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dissatisfaction with our level of contact with our lovers and the world. This is symptomatic of real fear of loving and being loved, which has a direct relationship with our inability to self-manage our lives. We become rigid, dogmatic, and unable to swim freely in the ocean of life. We spend enormous amounts of time and energy on neurotic conflicts within ourselves and have no energy to build a better place to

live in. Then we see the authoritarian social structure as something alien to us, as if it didn't mirror perfectly our own authoritarian character structures. Our inability to make contact with our lovers finds its perfection in our inability to unite as workers.

"Toilet training runs deep," a friend of mine said.

J.M. — Oakland, CA

Dear PW.

I just received PW #14 and enjoyed reading it especially "A Day In The Life of Employee 85292."

I have been unemployed since March of this year, a victim of the declining "computer technology" industry in NYC. I was laid-off twice this year by companies unable to hack it in The Big Apple. One of these was a poorly funded developer of a special-effects generator. One day the owner tells me that I'll be working for the duration of my project, the next day his crony lays me off. The other company was the educational superstar, Sesame Street. I worked there for over a year developing an educational game: non-competitive, non-violent, non-sexist, non-fun. It was how ever a programmers' paradise: surrounded by interesting non-programmers, friendly managers and a budget to buy experimental hardware. But then no one could foresee the consumer flocking to buy VCRs

in preference to a Commodore 64 and the last of us were given notice (not before most of the experimental equipment was taken; vultures from other departments, smelling blood, descended on our offices). This was the conclusion to a regular series of layoffs and corporate re-orgs that had begun a month after I started working there over a year ago. However to keep their conscience clear and public image unblemished a generous severance package is given to each laid-off employee. In fact no matter how bad things got around the office no one quit, in the hope of getting laid-off.

At any rate enclosed is the most recent issue of *Silicon Daze* [a nice underground zine from NYC: 365 Adelphi St. #2, Brooklyn NY 11238]

P.K. — Brooklyn

Hello again.

The S.H.I.T. test [printed on this page]

is from a recently formed faggot affinity group, made for Boston's Lesbian and Gay Pride march. The background includes the Department of Social Services, the ever-so-liberal governor, and the Massachusetts legislature deciding that only "traditional families" are appropriate homes for foster and adoptive kids. It started out as unadulterated homophobia, and has turned into fairly out-and-out slams against single and working mothers. Further background includes a plea on the part of Pride Celebrations, Inc., that we queers be aware of our "image" in the upcoming march—oops, parade. If spending hour upon hour over my sewing machine for a demure little pink and lace number isn't being aware of my image I'd like to know what is, but they tell me that's not what was intended.

I left issue 13 at the laundromat, could you please send me another?

Love,  
R.W. — Boston

## had enough S H I T ?

**Important:** Use only number 69 lead pencil. Fill the squares completely. Do not mark more than one answer. You will be penalized for unanswered questions or correct party lines. Fill in birthdate, social security number, federal homosexual identity number, and sun sign in the spaces provided. Be prepared to present three photo IDs; out-of-state licenses are **not** valid. No open-toe shoes. No jeans. Must be over 21 to enter. Void yourself where prohibited by law.

### THE STATE'S HOMOSEXUAL INQUISITION TEST

1. The traditional family consists of:

- ☐ a) husband, wife, child and divorce attorney
- ☐ b) a talking refrigerator, a microwave oven, and a vegomatic
- ☐ c) two fags
- ☐ d) one fag and a bottle of poppers

2. D.S.S. is an abbreviation for:

- ☐ a) Disruptive Social Services
- ☐ b) Desperately Seeking Susan
- ☐ c) Dukakis' Standards Suck
- ☐ d) Dyke Sexual Superiority

3. The most important components of good parenting are:

- ☐ a) pantyhose and stiletto heels
- ☐ b) Cabbage Patch dolls and a big backyard
- ☐ c) dykes and fags
- ☐ d) Barbie and Ken

4. A man is abnormal if:

- ☐ a) his lipstick and fingernail polish clash
- ☐ b) he smokes while he's in the shower
- ☐ c) he takes up less than three feet of space around him when he walks down the street
- ☐ d) he has the words "fuchsia" and "beaded curtains" in his vocabulary

5. A woman is abnormal if

- ☐ a) she owns a hammer
- ☐ b) she is not pregnant
- ☐ c) she wins an argument with a man
- ☐ d) she can't clean the house and cook the dinner after work before she helps the kids with their homework, bathes them and puts them to bed so that her husband can have a little peace and quiet after a long, hard day

6. A healthy family environment would encourage kids to:

- ☐ a) eat their vegetables
- ☐ b) learn their lessons good
- ☐ c) ask Beth
- ☐ d) respect both of their mothers equally



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we have too



# Skeleton--a ballad

Skeleton in baggy red drawstring pants  
 walking down the Ave  
 no shirt  
 drawstring tight around hip bones.  
 Skeleton walks up to young businessman  
 at bus stop  
 (jacket off, sleeves rolled up hairy forearms)  
 pats his finger phalanges  
 on 50% polyester shoulder  
 says  
 "I love you".

Up the Ave  
 toe phalanges lightly scrape calcium  
 on the concrete  
 turns in the glass doors  
 the head receptionist  
 she's the "office squeeze"—  
 her and the vice-prez are squeezing more  
 out of each other  
 than her words-per-minute would warrant—  
 his sockets swallow her brown eyes  
 as he pronounces  
 "I love you".

At the corner  
 bus exhaust goes right through him  
 but no lungs for cancer  
 the wind goes right through him  
 but he's not cold—  
 he's **hungry**  
 (and not much time to eat).

—Into McCarcass  
 no red meat though  
 orders a fishburger first bite  
 —squirt  
 tartar sauce drips down his ribs.  
 Staring at his thin reflection  
 in the window as he leaves  
 thinking  
 "what would my face look like—if I had one?"  
 "thick or thin lips—if I had any?"

—sudden skateboard whizzes by, skeleton bends at the knees  
 slightly and hops on, whoah! this the way to bang down that  
 torturous trail into hell! this the way to skid down the banks  
 of that grey smoldering river. This the way to—whoah!—rips past  
 a cash machine, some winter clearance sales, a barber shop,  
 used record store, a store specializing in contraceptives right  
 next to a funeral home, 2 Japanese restaurants an Irish bar and a  
 taqueria, a man on the post office steps answering philosophical  
 questions for a quarter and a thin blind woman behind a guitar  
 singing love songs to the clouds, everybody's got a purchase in  
 one hand and some change in the other, another cash machine a  
 white-haired lady pulling out two \$20 bills, spray-painted on the  
 wall next to her—"Ejaculate The State!", the tattoo parlor where  
 last week skeleton had etched into his radius and ulna tiny letters  
 that when he turn his wrist in, the bones/cross and the words  
 touch, like a kiss: "I love\*\*you"....

down down down, down down...  
 down down down...  
 ...now arriving on the edge  
 of the industrial zone  
 all the buildings square  
 fish canneries  
 experimental stations  
 the sun  
 shorting out at the horizon  
 like a bad connection  
 yellow lights  
 in the big parking lot  
 flicker on.  
 Skeleton back on solid ground  
 but not for long—  
 starts climbing up that stack over there  
 to the top.  
 Hard not to get feet  
 stuck in crevices oops—  
 step lightly don't break anything oops—  
 snaps like kindling.  
 Finds his spot  
 neatly folds himself up twice  
 like all the rest of 'em  
 neatly  
 tailbone sittin' on heelbone  
 skull bowed down to kneecap  
 kneecap in the jaw  
 rows of kneecaps  
 rows of white domes empty gaze...  
 ...occipital...parietal...frontal...ethmoid...  
 like continents  
 like memories  
 like cathedrals  
 like upside-down cereal bowls  
 in the dish drain!  
 rows of white domes empty gaze...  
 remember?...you were there once...  
 up on top  
 of the tall stack  
 of skeletons.

Harvey Stein

*In the last Processed World, several staffers took a shot at answering some readers' questions about our future visions and our preferences for organizational models. In this issue we are continuing the form of a collective editorial, and this time our subject is the omnipresent fear of AIDS—an issue particularly compelling in our city of San Francisco.....*

## QUARANTINE CORNER

*"They went on doing business, arranged for journeys, and formed views. How should they have given a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views? They fancied themselves free and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences."*

—The Plague, Albert Camus

*"Around the country, gay establishments or those that attract or hire many gays report business is falling."*

—The Wall Street Journal, 10/10/85

### MAXINE HOLZ

Fear of AIDS has become deeply embedded in the American psyche. In the popular consciousness, AIDS is comparable to the Bubonic Plague that wiped out from 1/3 to 1/2 of the European population during the Middle Ages. The dread of AIDS takes many forms. It ranges from the organized militance of parents concerned for the welfare of their children, to the ubiquitous office joke accompanied by nervous laughter. (Jokes are always a thermometer of popular uneasiness.) Does the anxiety around AIDS simply reflect the healthy concern for a devastating disease with unknown causes, or is it some sort of mass neurosis?

Let's put this danger into perspective. The chances of catching AIDS by casual contact are statistically infinitesimal compared with the chances, say of a frequent flyer getting killed in an airplane accident, not to speak of the chance of *anyone* getting killed driving on the freeway. If the problem was *really* simply a matter of possibility of severe impairment of faculties or death, then why aren't people up in arms about all these other things? The harmful effects of radioactive waste or toxic dumps on our health are far more certain and scientifically understood than the effects of sharing a meal with someone with AIDS.

Those who advocate extreme precaution against catching AIDS (quarantines of victims, screening for AIDS virus at workplaces) must recognize that they are calling for a degree of surveillance and

social control that would lead to unprecedented invasions of privacy. The price would be very high, not only for individual victims or carriers of AIDS and high-risk groups, but for the society as a whole, because everyone is guilty (or infected) until proven innocent (or "clean").

Why is the militance around AIDS so exaggerated? The main difference between AIDS and other social maladies is that AIDS is known to be transmissible via intimate contact with another infected human being. Actually, the cause of environmental pollution, industrial accidents, etc., is ultimately human activity, just as AIDS is a result of human activity of a specific type.

But unlike the former, which appear as unfortunate side effects of apparently immutable production processes, AIDS immediately evokes the murky world of lustful physical contact between sensuate bodies. It raises questions of personal and sexual "hygiene," arousing the traditional American puritanical horror of bodily secretions. For many, AIDS isn't just a punishment for homosexuality, but for sexual pleasure for its own sake.

Fear of AIDS is the fear of others, the fear of being invaded by another whom one is aware of as a lustful animal, the fear of someone else's sins rubbing off on you.

In this way, AIDS dread contributes to a general climate of terror and isolation, of distrust for one's neighbor (who might have AIDS, just as he might be a child molester or a rapist). And of course, AIDS is directly linked to more traditional militant "hysterias"—against promiscuity, homosexuality and anal sex, prostitution, drugs and pornography. The

obsessions with AIDS dovetails nicely with the general climate of moral crusading.

And so the cycle viciously closes in on itself. The anxiety of losing control leads to a paradoxical desire for more order and social control—not to gain meaning and coherence in our social lives, but to lessen the influence of the potentially harmful Other. The result is the opposite: the more we give in to our helplessness and our desires for some authority to solve our problems, the more we relinquish our capacity for freedom and action.

Concern and collective action around AIDS has provided support for victims of the disease and their loved ones, and pressured the authorities to conduct relevant research. But as part of a campaign of fear and ostracization, anti-AIDS militance leads to isolation, paranoia, a paralyzing fear of others, and a strengthening of authoritarian tendencies within our society and within ourselves.

### PAXA LOURDE

I'm in a bad mood. I come out of the Metro station and hear someone exhorting "You don't want to catch AIDS, do you?"

Aggressive, hoarse, mean—"You don't want to catch AIDS, do you?"

I see a woman and a man passing out a leaflet headlined, "Spread Panic, Not AIDS."

Nauseous with rage, I think, "Be cool, you don't know who you're dealing with. Just calmly take a leaflet and go on up to work." I walk up to the woman. My rage



blooms. I seize her entire stack and throw it to the pavement.

"Hey pal," she shouts.

The guy yells, "That man has AIDS."

The leaflet, put out by a fascist group (and we're not just whistling Deutschland Uber Alles) has a vicious agenda: compulsory blood tests for all food handlers, service workers, school teachers; intensive research institutes where AIDS patients can be brought to be treated in isolation; admittance to these institutions would at first be voluntary, *until* "public health officials determine that more compulsory quarantine measures are needed" (would a concentration camp by any other name smell so rank?).

I need to remind myself that I'm not in high school anymore. I won't, don't stand for the physical and psychic beatings that come from being a faggot in straight society. I have been attacked, called unclean, diseased, socially unacceptable. But now I have a better self image, friends I can talk to, community resources to mobilize. I start with the people in the office.

Jane arrives shortly after me. Kind-hearted, emotionally open Jane. "Did you see those leaflets?"

"Oh, I never take leaflets. But I did see those all over the sidewalk. Those people sure are messy. You know what I think? I think we're all going to catch it. The virus is mutating you know. Pretty soon it's going to be airborne, just like the common cold. And that guy they elected, what's his name, Ray-gun [contempt in her voice] he's just not putting enough money into research."

However, Jane remains compassionate. A coworker of her lover's has AIDS. His company, a savings and loan bank, has been having special AIDS awareness workshops for its employees. At the workshops, doctors assure that the disease is not contagious as well as going over how to have low-risk sex. Still, the coworker's boss is 'freaked out' and harasses him with every trick in the Supervisor's Manual for Mental Cruelty. Jane's lover is doing what he can to help the coworker—confronting the supervisor directly, complaining to the supervisor's boss, being an emotionally supportive friend to the sufferer. Jane staunchly feels that the supervisor is malevolent, her lover correct, the company enlightened. But she continues to think, no matter what she is told about the statistical improbability, that the virus is about to break out and become dangerously contagious.

My identity is besieged. I remember the week before at a demonstration at a building for a company that ships military supplies to El Salvador. In a moment of outrage I spit on the windows and say, "Here, have some of my AIDS." I am stunned at this expression of self-hatred and drift off, depressed. I realize the

hatred, mistrust, fear in me. Who should I be angry at, who should I blame?

At a *Processed World* meeting, somebody spouts the idea that perhaps AIDS hysteria has an element of common sense. People are right to mistrust the medical authorities—"Much as I want to believe them on the AIDS issue, why should I trust the same public health officials who tell me it's OK to go back into a PCB-soaked building?" I think about this question...

Scientific findings are not objective; scientific 'fact' always contains a degree of interpretation influenced by politics, by attitudes towards nature and the body, by all kinds of quirks. The gay community has fought the scientific and medical establishment in an unprecedented way. We've analyzed the research, both as lay people and as professionals; we've demanded more research money; we've insisted on scientific cooperation rather than competition; we've forced policy makers to pay attention to the more nearly true than what is politically or financially expedient. If workers were organized in similar ways to independently research and contest the official dictum of the public health department, we might see different interpretations of what constitutes a safe workplace.

Despite the horror of an unchecked AIDS epidemic, there are some real and potential silver linings:

- Other common diseases that are distinctly modern—cancers, strange allergies—originate in breakdown of the immune system. If positively handled, AIDS research, and public response to that research, could lead to an expanded awareness of the cause of such breakdowns, including the role of environmental hazards, mental stress, physical overexertion, depleted nutrition.

- The gay community's internal response to the crisis has been an amazing example of mutual aid. Community funded hospice programs provide emotional and practical support for the dying. Gay writers have produced a body of sustaining fiction, poetry, drama. We have produced fundraising benefits to suit every range of cultural affinity and bankbook, from grand nights at the opera to funky little Paul Goodman study groups. And what is also important and touching, we are kinder, more tender with each other. The experience of death coming quickly and early to our friends, acquaintances, public figures make us realize how precious each other's lives really are, how petty are many of the differences...

I never was able to imagine myself having AIDS. Then one night I dream. I am marked by Kaposi's Sarcoma, a skin cancer associated with AIDS. I arise from my sick bed and go out into the street. I force the world to confront my experience, my identity. Frankly, I see people shrinking away in terror. Frankly, I am terrified by

myself. I wake up in fright, but I soon realize I have been to that worst place. I can now venture back to resolution.



## ANA LOGUE

Junkies in a shooting gallery partake of pleasure or gain relief from a shared needle. Six years later, a child is refused entry to a school on the grounds that the disease she was born with is not curable, even though there is no reason to believe her condition is casually contagious. Her case, and those of other children like her, becomes an international *cause celebre*, even the president is expected to have an opinion on it.

Years from now high school and college students will write papers on children with AIDS comparing their case to the internment of the Japanese or the Dreyfus affair. The titles will read: "Hysteria and Social Policy," "Isolation vs. Contamination," or "Howard Hughes, Model American."

If one could only get AIDS by sharing a needle or as a foetus in an infected womb, I do not believe the disease would capture the world's attention, no matter how many people died. Nor would it probably catch the excitement of the medical community.

Medical care and research are pretty much up for grabs in our free economy, with the diseases of the rich and powerful receiving more attention and money than those of the poor and powerless. Thus, the U.S. has practically staked its national honor on finding cures for heart disease and cancer, which attack the rich as well as the poor, while taking a much more casual approach to the problems of inadequate prenatal care, malnutrition, and occupational diseases. AIDS as a disease of intravenous drug users and their children would probably receive as high a priority as the diseases of migrant farm workers poisoned by pesticides.

But, as we all know, AIDS is also spread through sexual contact, and it is especially prevalent in the gay community, where, rumor has it, there is an awful lot of sex going on. ("Ex Straight Claims, 'I Get Laid a Lot More as a Gay!'" Did I just imagine this headline, or did I read it in the *Enquirer*?) But thanks to the articulateness and political savvy of some gays, AIDS is getting the attention it deserves as an epidemic disease. Who knows how many lives have and will be saved just as a result of the public awareness efforts initiated by the gay press?

Who knows how many lives have and will be destroyed by the irresponsible and sensationalist mass media? ("Movie Stars Refuse On Screen Kisses," "High School Boy Gives Sweetheart Kiss of Death," "AIDS Scare Cancels Prom," did I read these headlines or am I making them up?)

A kid whose mother died of AIDS and who will probably not live to adolescence cannot go to school. Some nurses refuse to care for patients with AIDS unless they are allowed to wear protective masks and gloves.

I take my chances, ride subway trains and crowded buses, mingle with the coughing, sneezing mob. I worry about earthquakes and being killed or maimed in a car accident. I am not afraid of flying. When I die, I hope I leave behind something better than fear.



STEVE C.

How many people today would say that the job is a producer of stress? For many, headaches, sleeplessness, fatigue, anxiety and manifest behavioral disorders like alcoholism and drug abuse—and many forms of domestic violence—result from dealing with the job. Add to these maladies unrelieved stress and one can certainly understand how an immune system weakens. But are jobs considered as contributing to AIDS?

For AIDS patients, the attitudes that others have regarding AIDS must influence their day-to-day feelings. People should not be led to believe that they are at fault for the AIDS problem. But being sensitive to the needs of others is not a dominant trait of the powers that be. Most major newspapers and TV networks make understanding AIDS more difficult and more easily propagate stereotypes. Classification serves not only to group pathologically related factors, but translates psychological and social phenomena into superordinate causal categories of disease.

Basing our response to AIDS on the information we receive from popular press, TV, and radio gives us a fuzzy picture of the problem. Embedded in messages at regular intervals we are told that AIDS is a result of deviance. It is then easy to generalize the form (i.e. deviance) and align with the communicator. Information that fixes the cause of AIDS in certain modes of behavior reinforces conservative messages about self and society.



DENNIS HAYES

The horror of contracting AIDS is upon us. But unless a new, casually transmitted strain of AIDS emerges, most of us have less to fear from AIDS than from AIDS Phobia, a pestilence of fear that has begun to resemble the mass psychology of segregation and internment.

AIDS Phobia owes much to misinformation regarding AIDS transmission. Researchers and doctors insist that casual

contraction of AIDS is almost impossible, that for the virus to spread, an AIDS victim's blood, semen, or saliva must come into direct contact with another's bloodstream—e.g., like hepatitis, through a dirty needle, or during anal intercourse, through capillaries in the rectal lining. Statistics confirm this insistence; in fact, the deadly virus may no longer be spreading the way some fear it is.

According to a report in *Harper's* (Oct. '85), the numbers of AIDS patients are doubling every year. The current number is about 14,000. But the numbers are doubling *within* the high risk groups (gay men, intravenous drug users), not among the general population.

Only 6-7% of AIDS cases affect the "general population," and these are the lightning rods for AIDS Phobia. Research refuses to yield the AIDS transmission routes for these groups. But the stigmas of homosexuality and IV drug use mean that some AIDS victims are "high risks" who decline the association. We just don't know how vulnerable the rest of us are to AIDS.

More importantly, AIDS is spreading mainly among those already infected but not yet AIDS symptomatic. AIDS symptoms may surface six years after an initial infection. The projected yearly doubling of AIDS victims disproportionately includes those already infected—up to a million, says the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta—e.g. up to 50% of S.F.'s gay male population, 80% of NYC's IV drug users, and 60% of its gay men. This is not good news for gay men and IV drug users. But it clearly suggests the possibility of containing AIDS transmission, especially among low-risk groups. Yet AIDS Phobia fanned by a hysterical media, abounds in low-risk groups.

The media's AIDS Coverage declares a de facto gay quarantine, a lowering of a homophobic society's threshold for repressive tolerance. Indeed, high-risk AIDS groups may soon ask sociologists to develop a test for AIDS Phobia, a lobotomizing syndrome transmitted by passive eye or ear contact with AIDS-news headlines.

The U.S. military already tests the blood it collects from its bases, presumably as a drug screening measure. Marines testing positive have already been quarantined. Given the unavailability of false-positive AIDS testing, everyone should shudder at the prospect of AIDS-related segregation and detention. These things become thinkable in an AIDS-phobic culture.

While researchers hedge on 5-10 year projections for AIDS vaccines, one thing becomes apparent: the only way to stop AIDS now is to prevent it. This means, for starters, timely and accessible sex education and clean needles for IV drug users. The federal and most state, county and local authorities have sadly reached the

reverse conclusion.

The federal department of Health and Human Services cut its AIDS public education budget from a measly \$200,000 last year to a contemptibly small \$120,000 this year. In Los Angeles, morally outraged county politicians spiked a publicly-funded AIDS prevention pamphlet because a junkie could read in it how to sterilize an IV needle. Only in America could this problem occur. Canada, by contrast, makes sanitary needles widely available. The "morally objectionable" result is that the number of Canadian IV drug users with AIDS is very low.

Perhaps the most promising prevention is occurring within San Francisco's gay community, where the rate of rectal gonorrhea has dropped more than 75% in the last year. This is another indication that AIDS transmission, at least through anal intercourse, also may be declining.

To the degree that it fails to sponsor community-controlled AIDS prevention education, the government chooses the medieval strategy of reliance on fear, a tactic found wanting during earlier campaigns to control syphilis and gonorrhea. Fear of AIDS—i.e., AIDS Phobia—is precisely what we should be loathing, if we desire AIDS prevention. But AIDS Phobia runs deep.

Just as AIDS compromises immunity to disease, it suggests our vulnerability to any number of catastrophes from nuclear war to an eviction notice. What are our defenses against these? AIDS reminds us that our defenses are fragile. It is an unpleasant reminder.

As one AIDS researcher concluded "At some level people are associating sex with death." Perhaps this strikes at the lonely heart of AIDS Phobia. The thoroughfares for AIDS transmission—sex and drugs—run through those private joys in which we seek refuge from life's dangers. Without refuge from danger, fear is justified. AIDS consciousness burdens new and even longstanding romantic encounters with an uncomfortable suspicion. And with awkward exchanges of medical and sexual preference histories—exchanges that share all the warmth and intimacy of a baggage inspection by a customs officer.

Regardless of how nobly we struggle to be pragmatic and educational about preventing AIDS, the seeds of AIDS Phobia are sown. It poses in each of us a threat: the possibility that our insulation from fear itself is deficient. Are calming opinions and research about AIDS transmission, like those expressed in articles like this one, wrong? The government's record on epidemics—and its disdain for homosexuality and IV drug use—suggest we should begin to worry if and when it announces an AIDS vaccine. In the rush to take it, will we remember the carcinogenic polio (1960s) and Swine Flu (1970s) vaccines?







actuality signed by anybody, expressing grave personal concern for the unfortunate experience and assuring intensive quality control. Coupons good for the purchase of more Del Monte products would be offered as compensation. There was a bizarre schema for determining how much compensation the customer would receive. For a 50 cent can of peaches with a worm in it, the customer would get a \$1 coupon if she noticed the worm upon opening the can. If she dumped the peaches into a pot and saw the worm, she would get \$2. If the peaches reached the table, \$4. If the wormy peach was dished out onto a plate, \$6. If somebody bit Mr. Worm in half, she would get the grand prize of \$8 worth of coupons. For choking, if done by an adult, \$3—if by a child, \$5.

When customers wanted an explanation, they usually got it—but the explanations were disingenuous. We had form letters detailing the dangers of old, rusty, bent cans. (Surprise! Don't eat food from cans that are leaking and smell funny.) Another letter assured that canned fruits and vegetables were just as nutritious as fresh—after, of course, chemicalized vitamins and minerals were added back in to substitute for those killed in the preserving process. The supervisors were trained to identify

chemical compounds or different species of insects that might be found in someone's package. When the supes were stumped, they sent it off to the lab who could do chemical analyses or identify, say, a found bolt as coming from the drying machine for raisins. If a customer was really hurt, the complaint went to Legal so that they could fast-talk her into signing releases in exchange for minimal, but quick, reimbursement.

The response would be sent and the complaint would be filed along with any materials that accompanied it. Squashed-up pears, rotting worms and stale breakfast pastries would be stuck in the filing cabinet. The office reeked—and this was in the winter. I understand that in summer the place stinks to high heaven.

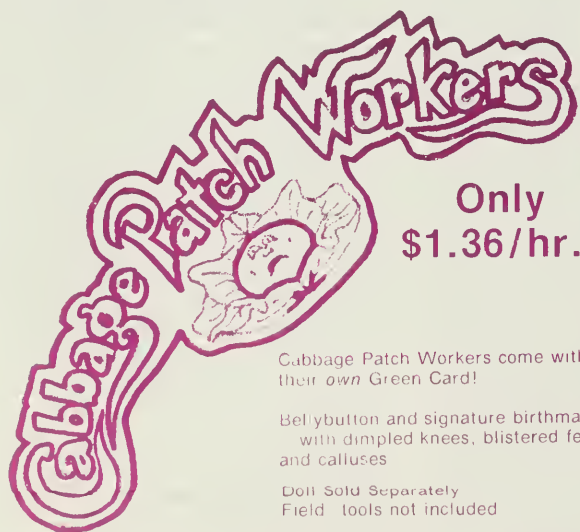
After working in the office a while, most of the workers found themselves avoiding canned and frozen foods—especially the 'problem products' like cream corn or canned salsa (I myself opened at least six letters relating how palls were cast on New Years Eve parties when someone fished up broken glass on their tortilla chip.) Some workers frankly said they were revolted by the stuff. Some asserted that fresh vegetables were healthier. Others commented that

most of the letters were from out of state, in California, though, we have a completely different way of eating (the snooty way out). Whatever the reason, we were all alienated from seeing the problems of the corresponding consumers as our problem, too. We knew, better than to buy the stuff in the first place.

#### Stale Joke

I liked working in this office for about a week. At first, the letters were interesting, funny documents. Instead of being grossed out, unable to eat, I found myself obsessed with food. Reading about a freezer-burnt chicken pot pie filled with artificially flavored cornstarch would make me think of the wonders of a chicken pot pie done right—a butter crust filled with chunks of stewed chicken and baby carrots in a light cream sauce. Returned cartons of Hawaiian Punch that looked and smelled like anti-freeze made me thirsty for fresh fruit juices, for bittersweet carrot juice, cloudy organic apple cider, bottled Napa Valley wine-grape juice. Letter after letter about shoddy canned vegetables made me hungry for crisp green beans cooked in butter, garlic and fresh oregano from my garden, swiss chard

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with an olive oil and white vinegar dressing and lots of freshly ground black pepper, or artichokes served with home-made mayonnaise...

But the amusement and heightened sensuality soon wore off. I became depressed. There were sad things, infuriating things, going on in these letters.

What were the letters saying? To paraphrase and simplify an idea developed by Claude Levi-Strauss—human-kind as biological beings stand midway between nature and culture. Food is our primary link both to nature and to each other. Our system for obtaining and preparing food indicates both our relationship to nature and the structure of our society.

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*Since this has happened, I'm going to buy Morton dinners, again.\**

The classic working-class family. The husband works at some low level job where it's normal to go home for lunch. He is the breadwinner, the king of the castle. And out of utter gratitude for her state of dependency, the wife is expected to be his personal servant, preparing all his food on demand. Bad enough. But what about TV dinners? The foodstuff is of poor quality, the portions meager. An analysis would reveal high salt content (just the thing for that high blood pressure) and destroyed nutrients from the cooking-freezing-baking cycle (three, three, three processes in one!). And let's not forget the various unnecessary and potentially carcinogenic chemicals used to color, thicken, flavor, emulsify, leaven, preserve.

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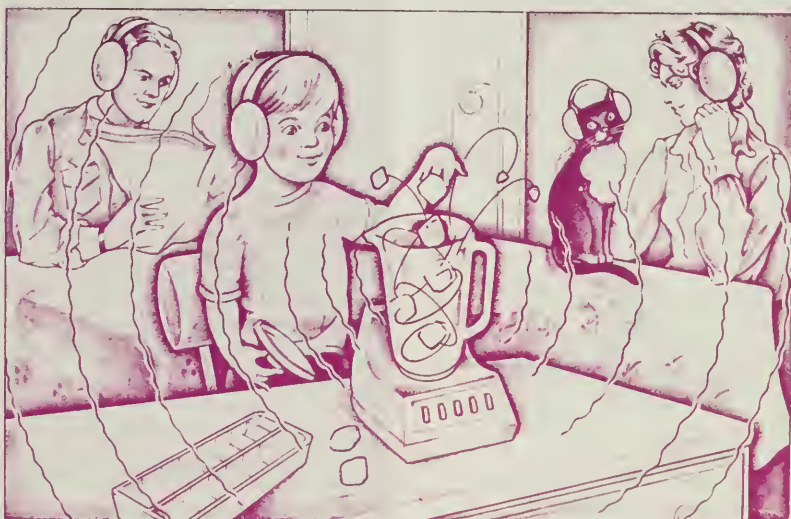
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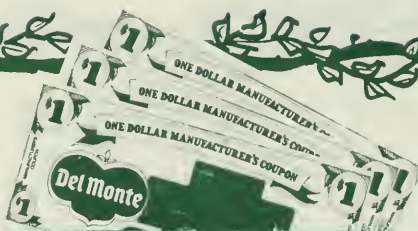
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### *The Price of Grain and the Price of Blood*

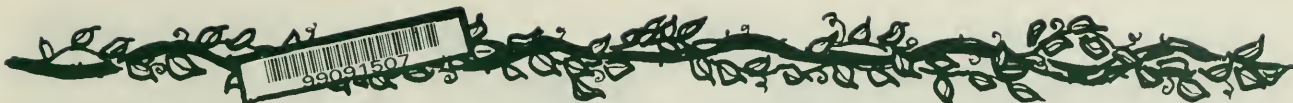
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the sublistings to find out how the company usurps traditional farm practices in different areas.

- In Costa Rica, the company gives special loans to politically well-placed landowners.

- In Guatemala, Del Monte owns 57,000 acres of agricultural land but plants only 9000. The rest is fenced off just to keep the peasants from using it.

- In Mexico, the company pays the farmers 10 cents a pound for asparagus that it gets 23 cents a pound for in the U.S.



## “Give Peas A Chance”

- In the Philippines, armed company agents coerce peasants into leasing their land to Del Monte’s pineapple plantations. Cattle have been driven onto planted fields to destroy crops, the peasants and their animals are bombarded with aerial sprays.

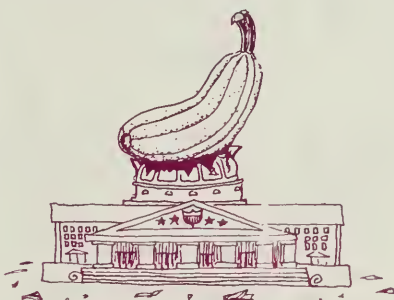
See also sublistings for Kenya, Hawaii, and Crystal City, Texas.

An anonymous source in Del Monte middle management relates a bit of company lore. In the early seventies, a new data entry clerk punched in the wrong destination code for a 480-boxcar shipment of lima beans grown in the Philippines. Instead of arriving in Japan for processing, the limas wound up, completely rotten, in Kenya. The company fired the clerk and cavalierly wrote off the loss as a food donation to starving Africa. Such charity.

A principal mechanism used for the destruction of native food systems is the conversion to export-oriented cash economies. The best lands are stolen/bought by the corporations—or, more usually, by their agents in the local upper class. Companies like Del Monte serve as the notorious “middleman,” taking over the secondary role of broker, shipper, packer, merchandiser. The displaced peasantry surge onto marginal

land which is quickly exhausted, farmed to death. Those remaining work for wages on the coffee, cocoa, rubber, luxury vegetable plantations. They buy their food from stores, much of it now imported and alien to the native cuisine.

Here in the U.S., the best lands are obliterated by housing tracts, shopping malls, industrial plants. I grew up in the Marysville-Yuba City area of California. Dividing the two towns is the Feather River. Like the Nile, the Feather River used to flood once a year, depositing a layer of fertile silt. This silt built up into a topsoil suitable for wonderfully productive orchards. The area used to be forested with peach, walnut, almond, plum trees. Until the construction of expensive, ecologically destructive dams, the towns used to worry about rainy season flooding. As I was growing up, more and more of the orchards were covered over by housing tracts. Immediately outside of town began the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, a region not as suitable for intensive farming but more pleasant for living (above the fog, below the snow, and with a view). And the foothills didn’t flood. It seemed obvious that people should live in the hills and leave the valley floor either in its natural state or as farmland. As an adolescent, I would spend afternoons mapping such ideal communities, sketching in community greenhouses and herb gardens as well as libraries, theaters, and hospitals.



## “Squash The State”

I still fantasize urgently about such communities. I imagine little burgs with lookout points onto the valley, parts of which are laid out for agriculture, parts of which have been reclaimed by nature. The housing tracts and shopping malls have been torn down—the material from the old buildings has rotted away, been recycled, or been shipped off to the anthropological section of the Museum of Natural History in San Francisco. The orchards have been replanted—but instead of miles of boring Elbertas and

Freestone peaches for the canning industry, we grow many varieties of fruit. This not only enlivens our diet and prolongs the seasons in which different fruits are available, it ensures that entire stands aren’t threatened by blights or bad weather affecting either certain genetic strains or particular times of ripening or blossoming. The diversity also satisfies the cultural preferences of the different peoples who have settled in the area.

There are fields of grain, again of diverse varieties and genetic strains. We never export grain, though. Most areas of the world are regionally self-sufficient in staple agriculture, and have well-maintained warehouses to protect themselves from food shortage. We do ship off a few regional delicacies, like spiced canned peaches—we had to do something with those old canneries!—nut butters, a Chinese-influenced plum sauce, virgin olive oil, wine. But our exports are nothing we can hold anyone to ransom with.

Individuals or small collectives have trusteeship for plots of land that they work themselves. I and a couple of friends oversee an olive orchard planted on the lower slope of the hills, a prune orchard a little below that, an orchard of mixed fruits—fancy peaches, kiwis, persimmons, other things we raise for the local market. Next to the orchards is an open cropped field that sometimes grows wheat, sometimes safflower, sometimes clover for grazing goats. The work required by our land trust varies from season to season, year to year. Things are especially hectic in late summer and fall when the olives need to be picked and pressed, the prunes dried and stored. We divide chores as best we can, but people have different capacities and other pulls on their time. Inequities happen, quarrels do flare up as a result and need to be mediated. Other col-



## “Cultivate a Sense of Humor—Hoe, Hoe, Hoe!”



## Why Do Foodservice Operators Prefer Home Cooking?

'Cuz they know  
what really goes  
into "foodservice  
operating"!!



lectives have been known to fragment in huffs of personal resentment.

We use a mixed-bag technology. Even if we wanted to use petroleum-based chemicals and fertilizers, we couldn't. They're just not available; oil is too scarce. We learned a lot from the farmers on a work-learn excursion we made to Italy, which has a climate similar to ours and grows similar crops. A lot of the stuff that comes out of the transformed U.C. Davis is useful, too. Davis, previously a research center for agribusiness, is now a bustling study center for the decentralized western North America food production systems. But many improvement come out of our own experimentation. We own the tools and machinery that we use day-to-day. The special stuff we either borrow from the county warehouse or have brought in by special jobber teams that share in the harvest.

At home, I have a vegetable garden

shared with the woman next door and her daughter. Now and then I coerce my lover to go out and pick some squash or rake the paths, but he mostly likes to stay inside and read. Jeff is a teacher; for him, dirt-poking ranges from tedious to uninteresting.

How do we prepare our food? Sometimes we cook at home, sometimes we warm up leftovers, sometimes we eat at the neighborhood kitchen. The cooking at the neighborhood kitchen is usually good, and the kitchen is a great place to catch up on local gossip and caucus for county meetings. Now and then, to celebrate, we eat at a specialized restaurant, where the real cooks operate...

### *Crusts of Brie and Such*

Such utopian thinking is not irrelevant pending some grand historical juncture. Instead, we should use such thinking

now, both to critique the present world, and to imagine and build the world that we want to create.

A sane food system, both for the Third World and for us, would mean community responsibility for, and control of, local food production resources. To leave them in the hands of the corporations is to be vulnerable to their repressive and irresponsible economic, political, and ecological practices.

Parts of such a sane food system already exist. In San Francisco, there are a couple of fairly good cooperatively-run grocery stores, a farmers' market where small growers can sell their produce, and a community garden network. There used to be a widely-patronized home delivery cooperative. These institutions should be emulated and broadened. But along with such worthy do-it-yourself projects, we should examine the land use in our vicinities. Our cities are built on valleys and plains that were once farmland—land that should still be the ground of our sustenance. Possible activities to retake this ground range from organizing community gardens\* on vacant land to fighting construction projects that eat into agricultural districts, demanding a redistribution of that land to small growers who use ecologically responsible methods.

When I announced at the *Processed World* shop that I was working an article about food, someone jibed, "I don't know if I want to read it. It will tell me

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\* Especially in an urban area, it's a good idea to get the soil tested for lead and other chemical residues before you start a garden. Make the landlord pay for it!

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**"Weed Out the  
Pesticide Pushers"**





alds is more working-class. Yet a reclamation of regional cuisine can be a motivation for a Third World people to reject the banal diet it has been forced to adopt since the destruction of its native agriculture. A similar urge on our part can be an enticement to the development of food distribution systems that supersede the corporate food industry because they offer food that is more pleasurable as well as produced in socially and ecologically responsible ways.

We also find pleasure in the communality of food—sitting down and gossiping while peeling apples, hoeing a garden together, sharing a feast. Such activities may seem too homely for political consideration. But think about what it means to have these activities supplanted from our daily life in favor of the more quickly prepared, the more brilliantly packaged. There are many ways to be starved. Food is our primary connection to the world around us and to each other. Leaving it to the corporations is self-destructive in more ways than one. Establishing an intimate relationship to food is a way of reviving our own diminishing humanity.

—by Paxa Lourde

about all the things I shouldn't eat but do anyway." We expect an analysis of the food industry to conclude by listing things that are unhealthy (like chemical and fat laded processed food), or deprive other people of needed resources (like the meat industry or the production of cocoa and coffee), or should be boycotted (like Campbell's soup, Nestles, table grapes...). Such calls for abstinence not only sounds like yet another puritanical injunction against enjoyment, but can also be impossibly inconvenient. Our food distribution system has been colonized by the food corporations, too. For instance, you're late for work and you don't have time to pack a reasonably nutritious lunch. You're going to have to forage at the company lunchroom or the corner roach coach. What kind of food do you really expect to find there?

People have a fierce emotional attachment to what they eat. Food is pleasure, security, cultural affirmation. A politics of food needs to account for all these things. Pleasure particularly is discounted in discussing food. Take pains with a pie for a party and you're immediately accused of being a yuppie. Propose that a group meet at a local cafe and somebody will assert that McDon-



# CHAINSaws & CRT'S

## DO NOT A FOREST MAKE

Book review of *Ecodefense—A Field Guide to Monkey-wrenching*, (A Ned Ludd Book, from Earth First! Books, P.O. Box 5871, Tucson, AZ 85703). Reviewed by Primitivo Morales.

Somewhere in California, in an air-conditioned and sealed chamber, a CDC 60meg hard disk spins in a vacuum. The system operator notes the log-on of a job lyrically named "RD\_CONTOUR\_39". Silently the currents ebb and flow; in another room a printer continues chattering to itself as it vomits out a few more meters of paper (recycled!). Smocked figures take the stacks, feed them to other machines, sort them into various bins. Messengers appear and the envelopes and boxes disappear to a Crown-Zellerbach building, all glass and metal. Polite people huddle over the paper, more machines are invoked, arcane symbols are inscribed; more paper is processed.



Backcountry Spiking Can Be Fun For The Whole Family!

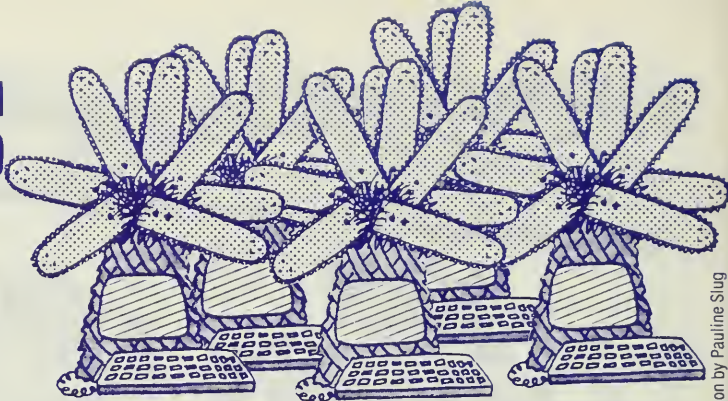


Illustration by Pauline Slug

In the early morning hours a week later, in the Siskiyou mountains, a couple of engineers in battered yellow hardhats climb out of a pickup truck, consulting blue-prints as they finish their coffee. With a team of surveyors they begin driving a confusing array of pine stakes with gaily colored ribbons into the ground. Before summer heat peaks, there is a narrow paved road snaking through the pristine valley, up ridges and into a primeval forest. Below the snarl of chainsaws and the clanking of Cats you can hear the low growling of logging trucks. The overall plan says that after the logging phase, one area is to be reforested as a tree farm, and the remaining land will become a subdivision of summer houses.

Even as you read this, more forest is vanishing beneath the saws and the Rome Plows. Wetlands are filled, prairies are fenced and grazed to death, more marginal areas are utilized. Whether in the Brazilian forest or the Jersey shore the old natural world vanishes.

There is a wide variety of evils that are the results of this: land erosion and silting, sinking water tables, ground & water contamination, less green and more noise, perhaps major catastrophe in the form of new weather cycles or reduced oxygen generation. For any of us who find joy in the natural world, it is becoming a grimmer and grayer place.

But wait! Two dark forms slip through the trees under a full moon. They move quickly up the ridge, pulling stakes as they go. Occasionally one will move off the road, reach up a tree, remove a ribbon. In the past few weeks other teams of people have been roaming the intended logging area, driving spikes into trees, mostly above head height. Several old mining roads into the area have had spikes driven into the roadbed, and in one place a culvert has been pulled out. Although the down-slope will erode, the road (and its users) would cause yet more damage.

As with many corporate greedheads' ventures, the project is on marginal financial ground. The increased costs of relaying survey lines and rescheduling crews, the greater security forces needed, have hurt. Today a letter came from the ranger's office saying that there has been an anonymous message that the trees in the lumber sale have been spiked. A few spikes have been found, and there are surely more. The chainsaws of the loggers won't find the spikes, but expensive blades in the sawmill will. (No, Virginia, it doesn't really hurt the tree.) The project is eventually cancelled. Maybe they'll be back; for now a



small defensive engagement has been won.

Although the exact details herein are fictitious, they outline a real phenomenon: Monkeywrenching. A 1973 book by Edwary Abbey, *The Monkeywrench Gang* (Bantam) gave a fictitious, stirring account of one such band of 'ecoteurs.' Now there is a new book, *Ecodefense—A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* which updates some aspects of this nefarious activity. Editor Dave Foreman, who has worked with The Wilderness Society in the southwest and Washington DC, is a founder of a militant environmental group called "Earth First!". Although I'm sure he would never violate the law himself, he clearly has talked to people who have. Most of the book is a well-written distillation of their skills and hard-earned experience. As a practiced billboard corrector I enjoyed his comments on the topic and found them well taken. From my juvenile activities in New Mexico I could appreciate his advice on the sabotage of bulldozers, land developers, and the like. Accurate, and fun reading, even if you never plan on doing it.

Chapters include tactics against roads and tires, vehicles and heavy construction equipment, defense of animals, propaganda and "miscellaneous devilry." There is an excellent chapter on security which should be read by all who engage in activities at which they would rather not be caught. He covers clothing, tools, communications, night operations, guards (two and four footed), and basic

evidence (traces you leave behind, or that cling to you).

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is the first chapter, Strategic Monkeywrenching. After a review of what this country used to have and has lost, he notes what else is threatened (a lot). He points out that much wilderness development is on a precarious financial footing; if it can be made expensive enough a lot of projects will be called off. He then outlines 11 principles in the fight against the despoilers.

Monkeywrenching is

1) *Nonviolent*—It is directed at machines and tools, and care is taken that people won't be hurt.

2) *Not Organized*—There is no central direction. The lack of a network prevents infiltration.

3) *Individual*—It is carried out by individuals or by small groups that know each other well.

4) *Targeted*—It is not random vandalism: strike the most vulnerable point.

5) *Timely*—Generally not to be done when/where there is civil disobedience occurring—it will cloud the issue and bring heat on allies who didn't do it.

6) *Dispersed*—It is widespread in the US (and elsewhere).

7) *Diverse*—All kinds of people are involved, and they will probably each have their own specialties, local or distant.

8) *Fun*—It is serious, even dangerous, but there is also excitement, camaraderie, etc.

9) *Not Revolutionary*—"It does not aim to overthrow any social, political or economic system. It is merely non-violent self-defense or the wild. It is aimed at keeping industrial 'civilization' out of natural areas and causing its retreat from areas that should be wild. It is not major industrial sabotage. Explosives, firearms & other dangerous tools are usually avoided. They invite greater scrutiny from law enforcement agencies, repression and loss of public support. (The Direct Action group in Canada is a good example of what monkeywrenching is not.) Even Republicans monkeywrench."

10) *Simple*—Simplest tool, safest tactic that will do the job.

11) *Deliberate and Ethical*—Those who engage in it must be very conscious of the gravity of their actions. This is a moral action—protecting life, defending the earth.

In general these are excellent points. He has a good sense of the morality of the activity, and the book continually emphasizes thoughtfulness in acting. Small, decentralized groups doing what they will is not only safer, but also more effective. People naturally choose targets of interest—perhaps not every malefactor will be impeded, but certainly a lot will. If one groups breaks up or is caught, there are still others out there. Unfortunately with the large number of targets, we must pick and choose. Occasionally 'targets of opportunity' should be seized, but if such actions are to have any hope of succeeding they must be



This Land Is Your Land

calculated. The point that action is to be fun is worth remembering, for so much of what we do isn't. There's no reason why action has to be a drag. Of course, if you don't enjoy such things you shouldn't engage in them.

Not everybody that engages in these actions qualifies as a monkeywrencher. You might trash heavy equipment only because it's there—get off on breaking glass and burning equipment—then ride off into the sunset, ruining the hills with your motorcycles, throwing away your beer bottles as you go.

My biggest problem with Foreman's analysis is point #9. As long as all we do is limit ourselves to defensive reactions to attacks, we will find ourselves defeated. Here and there we may chase the *zopilotes* (buzzards) away, but they go pick on some other area that is less defended, or turn their bloody attentions overseas. No, as long as there is this drive to subjugate nature, to value the land, water and air only as things to be bought/sold/used, the "developers" and the rapists will be back. If \$100,000 was more than they could afford this time, in two years maybe the accountants will say that such a sum is OK. For a small company such costs may make them stop, but for any of the major companies (Weyerhaeuser, etc.) an extra half-million in costs (which would be a major attack) will be written off. They pay higher insurance rates and continue

—they may make only \$3.5 million, but they can stand the smaller profit. And of course in a serious confrontation with the government, they can escalate farther and faster than we can if they think it is worth the financial and political price.

I myself have a strictly tactical endorsement of non-violence; as a strategy it is foolish. In addition to the clear need (at times) for self-defense, there are times that those who are most responsible for public crimes should be personally subject to retaliation. The big vulture should come to roost on their shoulder—not the guard's, or the secretary's, or the slob's out in the field. Such actions are never to be engaged in lightly; when it is done there must be a broad understanding of why: it must answer a common sense of justice.

The book doesn't touch on monkeywrenching outside of immediately threatened wilderness areas. But there's no reason for those in the urban jungle to feel slighted, or to travel great distances to do something. If you find yourself one day handling some information about something that sounds like a bad idea, you might check it out. If it really is bad, maybe you could create a timely intervention. At the very least you might be able to publicize some singularly sleazy aspect, and warn those near the affected area who may not yet know of future plans.

Whether in the Pacific Northwest, New Zealand, or the raped Lake Baikal in the USSR, this fight is international and very political. Acid rain doesn't stop at the Canadian border. "Free" and "communist" countries alike have a terrible record on conservation and reducing pollution; third-world countries face the threat of deforestation (no more cooking fires) both from domestic use, the US cattle barons, and transnational agribusiness.

To change the thinking that leads to the attack on the earth and to derail the system that does it, is very definitely revolutionary. It will require that all of us change the way we live; this country consumes over half of the world's non-renewable resources. Nobody else even comes close—how long do you think it will last, gringo? Radical change will strike at the very root of our economy (intensive and extensive exploitation), at the politics and psychology of consumption, and our relation to the natural world and with each other.

This book will not tell you why the Earth should be defended (if you can't feel it I'm not sure any book could ever explain it), but it will give some ideas on how to defend it. It's good on the mechanical details and is thoughtful in its purpose. The book is worth reading for anybody who is inclined to such resistance, for the curious, for law enforcement officials and developers, and for office/industrial workers who take an interest in the earth. If you wish that the world looked like the Pasadena Freeway, you won't like this book. But you might go off and play on your freeway, and leave a bit of green for those animals among us who don't. Wishful thinking.

Ecodefense is available for \$10, as if *Earth First! The Radical Environmental Journal* (8 issues a year, \$15), some very nice calendars and some 'silent agitators' (stick-on labels, one of which condemns Coors), from *Earth First!* at the address at the beginning of this review. They solicit suggestions on monkeywrenching (tested only, please) and clippings. Don't send your name on such items—send them separately from any commercial correspondence. They don't keep a list of buyers of the book and do not keep letters. *Ecodefense* will be published as an on-going project with periodic updates. Look in your local bookstore.

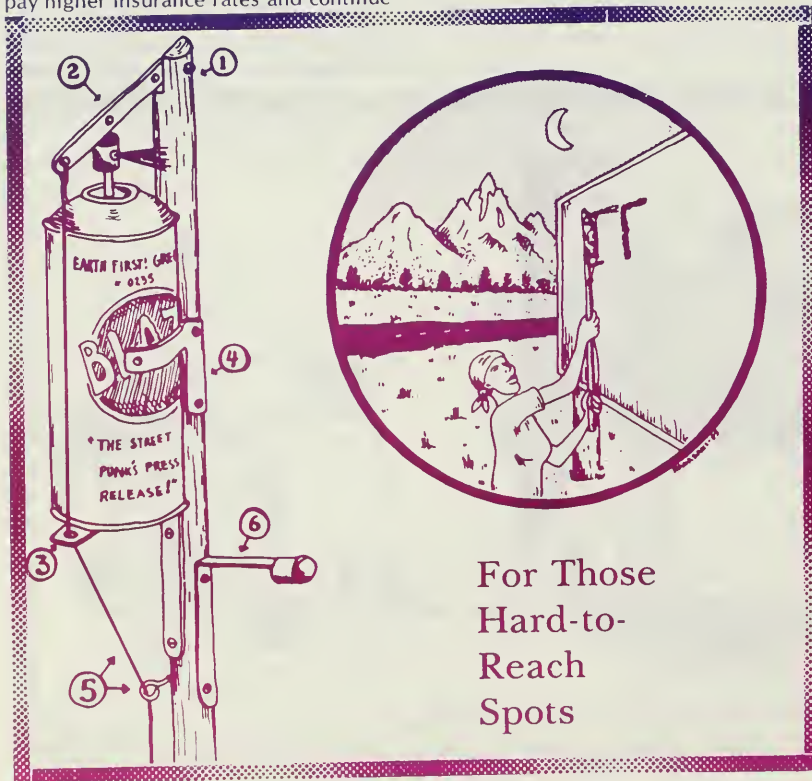
4 stars—check it out!

oooooooooooooooooooo

babysitting & laundry,  
shopping—her day  
off.

Kurt Lipschutz

oooooooooooooooooooo



For Those  
Hard-to-  
Reach  
Spots



The rally is in progress in another park across town, where between two and three thousand people are listening to the speeches or milling around, talking. A few small delegations are here from other unions. But

**FORCE**

Illustration by Louis Michaelson :



here!," the women yell, "You should be on this side!"

Somehow, trouble is avoided. Too many children in the crowd, perhaps. Too many outsiders, too many cameras and reporters. The march moves on, a mile through back streets and out along a concrete access road to Richard Shaw, Inc., the second struck plant. The helicopter keeps circling overhead, inviting rude gestures and jeers from the crowd. A few minutes of chanting slogans into the clenched visored grins of the riot police, and the marchers disperse.

Carlos, a worker in the cannery and self-appointed publicity director for the strike, has arranged a meeting at his home after the march. Several people jam into his living room/kitchen while children play in the adjoining bedroom. These two tiny rooms and the bathroom house Carlos, his wife Teresa, (also a cannery worker) and their two children at a rent of \$300 a month—typical of what seasonal workers have to pay for equivalent or worse housing.

One of those present is Sergio Lopez, a business agent for Local 912. Over the last decade, he explains, the frozen food industry in California has run into trouble, most from intensified foreign competition. Although the Watsonville-area plants still processed 40% of the nation's frozen broccoli, brussels sprouts, green peppers and spinach last year, frozen broccoli imports have increased dramatically, from 33 million pounds in 1983 to 65 million pounds last year. Watsonville companies also face inroads from Mexican-grown vegetables processed by non-union labor in Texas.

"Three years ago, the manager at Watsonville Canning, Smiley Verduzco, asked the workers for a break. He promised to make it up in the next few years." The workers in the lowest bracket, comprising 90% of the workforce, went along. They agreed to a cut

from \$7.06, the industry standard, to \$6.66 an hour. When this contract expired in June, the company offered a "two-tier system" which would freeze rates for current employees and hire new ones at \$4.25. In August, the workers unanimously rejected the offer and demanded a return to industry parity at \$7.06, as Verduzco promised.

After a series of propaganda meetings with various groups of workers in the plant, management simply implemented its new plan without a contract. Then, when the union brought in the Federal Mediation Service, the gloves came off. "We couldn't believe it," Lopez recalls. "They offered \$4.75 to existing workers and \$4.25 to new hires, and added 54 takeaways, including the dues checkoff (automatic subtraction of union dues from workers' paychecks). They eliminated vacation pay for seasonal workers, who are the majority. Everybody walked out." In the last week of October, management raised its offer to \$5.05. The strikers voted 800-1 against acceptance.

Shortly after the strike broke out at Watsonville, rumors spread that Richard Shaw Inc. was about to follow Watsonville's lead. Shaw's proposal turned out not to be quite as drastic—a cut from \$7.06 to \$6.66, the previous Watsonville norm, and a mere 25 takeaways—but workers at Shaw joined the walkout anyway, in a bid to reduce the labor pool available to each plant. Other area canneries have extended their old contracts with the union by one year, waiting to see what happens at Watsonville.

For the first 8 weeks of the strike, plants operated with 80-100 workers apiece, far below the customary 1000-2000. By all accounts, the strikers had the support of the Watsonville community. Strike rally flyers in the windows of many local stores confirm this impression, as did the fact that virtually no locals were crossing the picket lines.

Lopez says that it was obvious to him

## Bank of America Supervisor's Guide: Union Activities



### Instructions for Bank of America Officers and Supervisors

#### HOW TO RECOGNIZE A UNION ORGANIZING ATTEMPT: SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS TO LOOK FOR

There are several common signs which frequently signal that a union organizing drive is in process. If any of the following signs or symptoms are observed, report to Management immediately.

Union authorization cards, handbills, or leaflets appear on the premises or in parking areas. (See page 4 for exhibits of typical union authorization cards.)

Employees meet and talk in out-of-the-way places.

Employees begin meeting and talking with known union members.

The nature of employee complaints changes, and frequency increases.

Complaints are made by a delegation, not single employees.

Strangers appear on bank premises or in work areas.

Employees develop an unusual social consciousness or begin using a strange vocabulary.

Employees or strangers show unusual curiosity about bank affairs and policies.

A personal visit, a telephone call, or registered letter is received from a union representative.

Early recognition of an organizing attempt and the initial reaction to such activity is the most critical factor in resisting unionization of our staff.

It is in the first few hours of a campaign that the most serious errors, both legal and political, are made. These errors may result in long, expensive litigation, or in the union becoming the bargaining agent for our employees, or both.



the company had prepared for a strike when he was called to State Superior Court only five hours after the walkout began, only to find three attorneys from the nation's foremost union-busting law firm, Littler, Mendelson, Fastiff & Tichy, representing Watsonville Canning. "The paperwork had been all ready to go to Superior Court for a restraining order, they probably already had their affidavits full of lies prepared beforehand." Quickly, the court moved to limit the total number of pickets at each plant to 60, and to forbid strikers from approaching within 100 yards of the gates. Since then, the picket limit has dropped steadily, and now stands at four to each gate.

Moreover, Lopez says that one week before the strike, the company began "a terrorist attack" on the workers. It posted signs with new performance standards (20 heads of broccoli per minute instead of 16) and began terminating and suspending people, especially workers with over fifteen years seniority, "for really trivial reasons."

Despite all this, Lopez claims that management's position is not as strong as it looks.

"It's only a matter of time before they start running out of product. They need a full line of product or they can't find buyers. If the mechanics, floor leaders, lab workers, forklifters, and so on had not walked out in such great numbers, I'd be worried that the company would get going in a matter of weeks. But no way can they train 1000 workers with a few supervisors."

Carlos is less optimistic about the possibility of winning the strike soon.

There are two peak seasons at the cannery—the first one lasts from mid-February to mid-May, the second begins the first week in September and lasts through November. Carlos says that in the early season this year, the cannery was producing much more than usual. He figures they were already preparing for the strike. Margarita, a floor leader with 15 years seniority, postponed a vacation to Mexico this year when she realized the company was stockpiling and heard supervisors discussing a possible strike in the fall. Carlos believes the strikers will have to ride out the winter into spring, when the company

with the mood of the workers. Apparently, the leadership has come not from the three Teamster business agents assigned to the two plants but from the ranks of the workers. Some of these unofficial organizers have no previous experience in strikes, while others are veterans. Jorge was active in the farmworkers' organizing drives in the early 70s, and Carlos, then a university student in public relations, did support work for striking workers in his native Mexico City. Both of them tell of the total disorganization in the first few days after the workers walked out.

Carlos: "We had a meeting to organ-

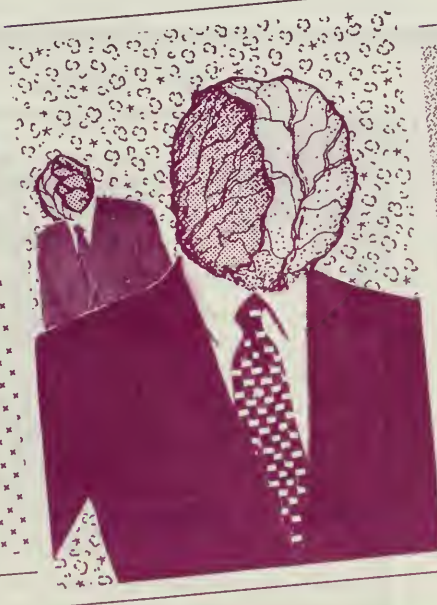
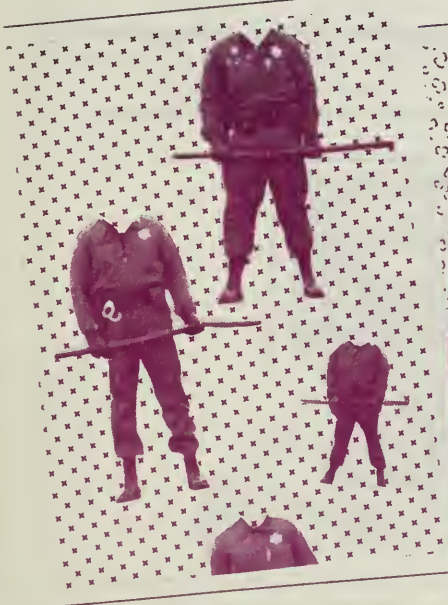
**"I said 'Fine, what time is the meeting?' and [the Teamsters] told me I couldn't come. I was really mad. I tried to go in but they took me out by force."**

will really begin losing a lot of money if the plant isn't working at full capacity.

#### SELF-ORGANIZATION

Several workers we interviewed complained about the union's lack of militance in organizing the strike. Sergio Lopez claims that the union could not prepare beforehand because "we didn't know who we could be able to count on during the strike, who would cross picket lines." It is surprising, in that case, that local union officials were so out of touch

with the mood of the workers. One person would say 'I'll take the 2 o'clock shift,' another 'I'll take a shift at 9,' and nobody was coordinating it. So I went around signing people up on a schedule, and handed out copies the next day. Then we put a leaflet together and collected money, you know how we do it in Mexico, passing a little can around. Someone told me: 'why don't you get some money from the strike fund?' I didn't know there was a strike fund! As it turns out, there's a fund of \$45 per worker per week and the money was just sitting in the bank! So I put a budget



Graphic by Pauline Slug

together and went down to the union hall. They said they'd present it at their meeting. I said 'Fine, what time is the meeting?' and they told me I couldn't come. I was really mad. I tried to go in and they took me out by force. But they accepted my budget."

Even after the budget was approved, it took Carlos a couple of frustrating days to get through the Teamster bureaucracy. He is hoping to get control of the strike fund placed in the hands of elected worker delegates. Currently there are worker reps on the board that control the funds, but they have no power because they can't sign the checks.

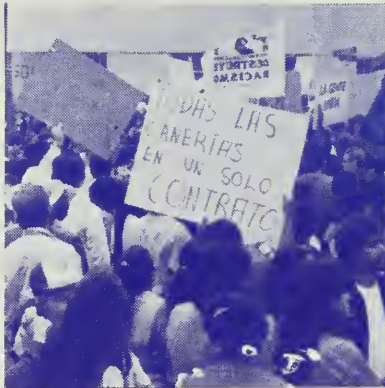
Carlos spent the first \$1,000 on three spots on local TV. He placed the ads during commercial breaks in the popular Spanish-language soap opera *Topacio*. "At first everyone thought that was bad, to put our ads in the middle of a soap opera. But I said 'hey, how many people do you know that don't watch *Topacio*?'"



Gloria and a few others complained that the union is not doing enough to help workers who have been arrested at the picket lines:

"The union has a lot of money, it was their duty to get the guy who was arrested out of jail and we had to get the money together 'cause they didn't do it."

Other complaints include lack of communication from the union. Two weeks into the strike, Local 912 called the first



general membership meeting. "A union guy talked for hours," Carlos recounts, "and then another guy translated." (Many of the workers speak very little English). "Then the union guys said they had to leave 'cause they had a court date, and everyone left the hall." Carlos: "Their speeches were a waste of time, boring people with a long talk when what was needed was to get things organized, and let people air their grievances."

The strikers did not wait around for



union officials to call another meeting or get things organized. On October 15, the ad hoc "Strike Committee" called a general assembly which was attended by over 500 workers. The assembly elected six committees to handle various needs arising from the strike. The finance committee coordinates the strike as a whole; other committees handle publicity, childcare, solidarity and outreach to other workers and communities, and help in collecting welfare and other public assistance. Each committee consists of ten delegates, five from each struck plant. "A lot of people who got involved in the committees didn't think they had any talent for organizing or public speaking," says Margarita. Now they're finding out they can do it."

These facts are in contrast to the picture presented by local and national media (including the *New York Times*) which tend to portray the strike's militancy as the work of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a national

## On the cutting edge of food technology



The new Digichomp Food Analyser from Ang's R & D Kitchens

Angela Greene/From Silicon Daze

### White Flag #1

#### Watching Olives Go Up

\$ .99  
\$1.09  
\$1.19  
\$1.29  
\$1.39  
\$1.49 on special. Regular price \$1.89

Linda Thomas



left-led caucus within the Teamster's union. A handful of TDUs were active in pushing the union to call for a strike, they helped with support and publicity, and organizing the October rally. Also, local affiliates of the TDU Cannery Workers' Project have emerged as spokespeople for the strike, and two TDUs were elected as delegates to the strike committee. However, several unaffiliated rank-and-file organizers we spoke with remain somewhat suspicious of the TDU, fearing that it wants to

would tail the scab vans back to nearby towns where the strikebreakers were dropped off at their homes. Strikers would then approach them and try to make their case. This method had some success with Mexican workers, less with the Filipinos and other ethnic groups the company is bussing in. Now the situation is hardening. The scab vans are regularly pelted with rocks and bottles, and an occasional molotov cocktail. Loading dock pallets are regularly burned. (During the weekend of October

"Are you kidding? You should have seen this one nineteen-year old girl. She's the one that got the windshield with the rock."

Another woman line worker is even more forthright. "Sure, I'd go 'round teh back gate and kick the scabs' butts when they came out. I'm not afraid of going to jail. I've been there before." And more ominously: "The Latino people, man, they're not afraid of violence. They'll get the scabs even if it has to be with weapons, they'll scare the people off the



capture the leadership of the strike—increasingly a collective process outside union control—as part of a move to take Local 912 away from the more conservative officials now in charge. "Sure, there are problems with the union," Carlos says. "But we don't need this right now. We can settle this stuff later, in open meetings of the workers."

[When the strikers organized a second march on November 3, the Teamsters decided at the last minute to hold an "official" rally one week later, and urged the strikers to cancel their march, which had already been publicized. The strikers refused to change their plans. As one woman put it "We've had a lot of promises from the union. We'd rather have two marches than no march and a promise."]

#### DIRECT ACTION

Both mainstream media and the Teamster bureaucracy blame TDU for the "violence" and "vandalism" associated with the strike. In fact, since the beginning of the strike, the workers have been exerting all kinds of pressure, both direct and indirect, to prevent the companies from recruiting scabs and moving them into the plants.

"At first, we would try to inform the scabs and persuade them not to go in," says Gloria, pregnant mother of four and a three-year veteran of Watsonville Canning. At the end of the shift strikers

5, a packing plant leased by Watsonville Canning was burned to the ground. The company blames the workers, four of whom have been arrested on charges of arson and attempted murder, but other strikers point out that the plant was tightly guarded and accuse the company of pulling an inside job to discredit the strike.) A woman worker tells of a bar-owner who had been recruiting scabs on commission. "The people went to talk to him and convince him to cut it

**"Women workers are taking a role in the strike that belies the cliché of the submissive, downtrodden Latina."**

out. He didn't, so his windows got smashed." She points out a man chatting with friends on the street. "See that guy? He owns a restaurant right by the cannery. We found out he's been helping scabs get in and out. So when we win the strike, we're goin' to boycott him." She chuckles.

Women workers are taking a role in the strike that belies the cliché of the submissive, downtrodden Latina. Carlos laughs when asked whether women have been involved in a particular incident.

busses."

Underlying the women's open, defiant anger and displays of "masculine" bravado are the subtler changes in the traditional male-female relations the cannery workers' life has brought about. Many two-job couples with children, separated from the network of female relatives that would normally handle childcare in such situations in Mexico, are deliberately working different shifts so that one parent is always home with the kids. The men seem to have adapted fairly well to their new role, though not without some grumbling; at the October 15 meeting, one man half-jokingly proposed a husband-care committee to go with the one for childcare. "This kind of change is especially important for Latino men," says Margarita. "They're so used to their women waiting on them hand and foot."

#### A BLAZE CONTAINED?

The way in which an apparent weakness—isolation from the normal Mexican family support network—has become a strength, seems to exemplify a pattern in this strike. At first sight, the strikers are in a poor position. As (mostly) immigrants and seasonal workers, they are not only uprooted from their cultural and political background, but linguistically isolated and vulnerable to attack from the Immigration Service—the hated "Migra." Yet these problems,

too, may turn out to have their useful side. Because the Watsonville workers are fairly homogenous, they tend to stand together against an alien and often hostile Anglo environment—personified in everyone from the redneck plant management that “treats us like stupid children, like animals” as Carlos puts it, to openly anti-immigrant Teamsters International president Jackie Presser. Correspondingly, the strikers are not as subject as most U.S. workers to the atomization and sense of powerlessness that come from suburban dispersal and the virtual disappearance of traditional working-class community. Moreover, the fact that their struggle has an inescapably ethnic dimension may allow them to tap into a powerful current of support in Latino communities across the country.

The bureaucratic inertia of the union, too, has paradoxically become an advantage. Faced with the footdragging of Local 912 officials and the International, the strikers have been forced to develop their own organization, their own forms of action. At least partially, they have

escaped the constrictions imposed by the whole apparatus of union hierarchy, labor legislation and “collective bargaining” carried out by a few individual highly-paid officials behind closed doors. They have not challenged the nature and content of their work—the boredom and lack of control, the processing of vegetables that many wouldn’t buy themselves (some workers laughed uproariously when asked if they ate Watsonville Canning’s products). But the effort of self-organization and collective debate have triggered questioning that is already slicing deep into old assumptions. “You know, I was a model worker,” says Margarita. “And I realized I’ve given them my youth, and for what?”

It would be easy to see the Watsonville frozen food strike as archaic, part of the death-struggle of old-style unionized industrial labor; or as “exceptional” because of its Mexican immigrant base. In fact, the strikers have been lucky enough to find a unique source of strength in their heritage, but the conditions they face are both modern

and universal; the cold hand of business power snatching back the gains won at such cost over half a century. Moreover, their situation highlights the fact that national boundaries are increasingly illusory in a global corporate economy. As San Francisco offices fill up with workers from Mexico, Central America, and Asia, factories are moved south and east in search of cheaper, more intimidated labor. If Watsonville looks almost like part of Mexico, of the “Third World,” this only reminds us that much of the “Third World” is now highly industrialized, and by many of the same corporations whose offices we work in here. The glaciers of multinational capital, like a new Ice Age, cover the globe. The courage, resourcefulness and insistence on rank-and-file democracy shown by the Watsonville strikers provide a valuable example to all who seek to roll those glaciers back.

—by Caitlin Manning &  
Louis Michaelson



# THE YOUNG METEOROLOGIST

Editions available in English, Spanish and Jargon

Clearly, one of the most devastating effects of the current administration’s budget cuts has been the awful weather we’ve been having these past years. While everyone talks about it, and some even purport to take action, we of the Weather Action Group are at the vanguard of the struggle against excess precipitation. We believe that the time for umbrellas and raincoats has passed. Staying indoors is apathetic escapism. We must seize the offensive and begin a constructive plan for climatological self-determination. That’s why we say: “RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY!”

Any principled discussion of this issue must first begin with a critical examination of the previous attempts to halt the torrents of fat cats and running dogs that Reagan claims are merely “trickling down” on the outdoor working class. Many have tried, but look out your window and you can see that they have failed.

Why? Let’s look at a few examples.

**The Weather Underground:** They believed that their violent acts could spark the drenched masses to take up arms against the downpour of oppressive moisture. But violence begets more violence. Where are they today? Washed up by a flood of state repression.

**The Freeze Movement:** The trouble here is that they refuse to face the broader issues. Once we freeze the water, where are we going to put it? And further, who will control it? Will the resultant wealth be used on the part of the frozen foods industry? And what about poor people who need to drink water, shall they suck ice cubes?

Even the Democrats give lip service to the weather; but remember, **NO MATTER WHO REIGNS, THE POOR GET SOAKED!**

We at WAG say the time has come to change all this. Our strategy is to

build coalitions with other warm-weather loving peoples. We are calling for a letter writing campaign to get some dry kindling. Most importantly, to counter the cynical propaganda of weather reports we will hold high the shining example of the Albanian Republic, that bastion of planned weather. In Albania, thanks to the valiant revolutionary meteorologists, it only rains once a week, and then only at night. And you can bet no one leaves any tools out in the rain. But you never hear about this from weather reporters; they know that in a truly just society they’d have to work for a living. Trust our plan: we can bring an end to this tyrannical weather by June (or July at the latest).

Remember, **GOOD DRAINAGE IS NOT ENOUGH!!**

For more information call our 24 hour hotline:  
(415) 936-6478  
(415) WE MOIST



# MONTGOMERY STREET MORNING



Illustration by Louis Michaelson

**M**ontgomery Street morning smells good in a new grey suit, white shirt and tie, attache case and a full wallet. Tips of the skyscrapers cut through the rolling pink-white clouds into blue. People hurry, brush by, excuse themselves with automatic smiles. Howling young messengers speed old bicycles recklessly through packed intersections. The city awakens and bustles to its responsibilities.

On the last block before the office, I picked up speed and almost knocked him over, the little old man who stood suddenly before me as if dropped from a space-ship, pleading in a voice low but hoarse, "Ya got a buck for food?" I stammered, rushed by without answering, and looked back to see him staring at me, hand still out. He was old enough to be my father, pure white hair, red skin, old blue pants torn and hanging, beard grown long and aimless, blood hardening under his left eye. I felt a chill and, still looking backwards, crashed into a garbage can. Regaining my balance, I touched my leg where the pain was. The day felt already disordered. I took the rest of the way to the office slowly.

A few blocks from home I often meet a small woman who travels with her bags. She gives the impression of age, with the thick lines that fill her face, and her grey scraggly hair, but I'm told she is not more than 40. Her bags are old paper shopping bags that are tearing at their handles. They are overfull; clothes and papers are always falling out onto the sidewalk. Her feet, with their large purple veins, are visible through gaping holes in her sneakers. A sick-looking terrier follows her everywhere.

She stops to window-shop at garbage containers and shopping center dumpsters. I look at her, trying to take her in before she notices me. That day it's too late; she adjusts her waddle and approaches me. Her little blue eyes are deeply bloodshot. Her brown smock is tearing down the middle. She is bent by the weight of her shopping bags. She comes impermissibly close, leaning a bag against my leg and eyeing my red shirt. I smell urine coming from her. She glances at me apologetically as she touches, then fondles, the left shirt cuff. She looks greedily at the material, then up at me with long-suffering eyes and says, "I'd like this for my son," nodding a few times for emphasis and smiling with strange hopefulness.

I arrive at the corner of Montgomery and Pine, surrounded by moving walls of business suits. Yet the open brown hand reaches out to me alone. The skinny dark man moves his lips frenetically and only tortured bursts of sound escape. His hair is greasy reddish-brown. He wears purple pants. He is frighteningly thin. His mouth shakes more than it speaks, a stuttering foghorn. "Sa—sa—sir" His hand shakes hard in front of me, his eyes try to steady themselves to meet mine. "Sa—sir—wa—wa—wou—ha—ha—hav—si—so—so—som—som—mo—mo—mon—mon—mon" He vibrates painfully. I'd just been in a thick crowd; now I'm alone, facing the man and blocked from escape by a spiteful convoy of cars. "Plah—plah—puh—sah—ple—sa—sa—sa—sa—sa—sar—sar—ple—sir" Drops of saliva slip over his lower lip; I shake my head and look away.

I could become the Old Garbage Man in 25 years if I



could live that long. His white hair is matted into one clinging moist mass, his face is reddish-brown; he looks like he's been wandering across a desert. He stops at each trash can in the Financial District, bends down, feels his way through its entire contents and withdraws food, paper and other recyclable materials. He eats the food on the spot, before anyone else can get it. Thousands of fresh suited young people pass him as he gnaws at his throwaway half a fast-food hamburger smeared with colorful jelly. He reaches down hungrily more. His hands caress a bitten-off slice of spoiled bread and garnish it with a slice of something that he thinks of as a chunk of re-

through fast-moving crowds, they who  
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A dream has come back to me repeatedly since I've lived in San Francisco. I have no place to go and I'm locked up with others, dozens, hundreds of others who have no place to go. There are no clocks or windows; the hours have nothing to mark them. Our clothes are old and have holes. I wander the huge grey room and wonder what I'm doing and where I've been. I suddenly feel a depth of sweat on my face. There are blisters in my mouth. The clothes stick to my skin. My shoes are loose; my feet rub painfully against them. I can't walk straight though I don't know why. My right shoulder twitches. My arms and legs move uncooperatively, like members of a large contentious family. Air cools my crotch and I feel it coming up through my pants. The others wait with me. Their eyes sit quietly between bruises. Their clothes hang without tension. I have no hope or expectations. They've been lost somewhere with my case.

I don't see me.  
 I'm curled up on the curb and can't get  
 up; the crowds rush over me and the  
 ruthless bicycles are coming and they  
 order is a groan. I try to follow them, I walk, I  
 labor-run, but I'm too slow, they get away  
 I shout and shout and beg and  
 they're out of sight. And then it's  
 Montgomery Street morning again, and  
 I can't form the words; all that comes out  
 they ignore me. I try to call louder but  
 they don't  
 People from my office pass us. I see  
 as through the fog, but they don't  
 I call desperately to them but  
 attaché case.  
 They've been lost somewhere  
 I have no hope  
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by Bob McGlynn, a.k.a. The Enigmatic Emissary  
(opinions expressed here are mine and not that of  
any group or organization of messengers)

I was riding his bike on 46th toward Broadway. Up ahead was an illegally double-parked bus going in reverse, and across from the bus was a car that was pulling out of a parking lot, ready to enter 46th. The biker had the right of way but signaled the car anyway to let her know he would be proceeding on. The car driver accelerated, and the biker was caught between the forward motion of the car and the reversing bus. His body was crushed and he lost one leg immediately in a pool of blood. The cops showed up but basically did nothing. They didn't even fill out an accident report. They let the driver go. It was another biker who called the ambulance and found out the guy's name before he lost consciousness. The cops were white; the driver was white and was seemingly drunk. The biker was Black...and a NYC bicycle messenger.\*\*\*

.....  
\* a true story  
.....

I remember once asking at a meeting of 50 bike messengers, "has anyone here **not** had an accident?" No one raised their hands.

Such is the reality of bicycle messengering beneath the human interest stories which romanticise "those nonconformist free spirits, going for the big bucks" and/or condemning us for murderous wild riding, "law breaking," "bad attitudes," "mental retardation," etc.

I find that many peoples' overcuriosity about bike messengers borders on the neurotic. "You do **that!**?... Wow..." or (jealously) "Well you've got some freedom but you **can't** do it **all** your life you know." Perhaps they want/need a little of that "free spirit" stuff: the relative frontier of the open street vis-a-vis the unnatural enclosedness of 9 to 5 land can be quite intriguing with its danger and autonomy.

I'm going to concentrate on my own experience as a bike courier, although there are many types of messengers, primarily foot messengers, truckers, MC's (motorcyclists), and your occasional skateboarder or roller skater.

Bikers work mostly for messenger companies that specialize in messengering, although some companies (say in the film industry) employ their own in-house bikers.

What we do is simple; we ride to one place, pick up ('p.u.' in our lingo) a letter, package, whatever, put it in a bag strapped around our back, and deliver it to another place. We get most jobs by continuously calling up our company dispatcher who directs us to the next assignment. The alternative if you feel like saving phone money (we aren't reimbursed for phone calls, although many clients let us use their phones for free), is to go back to the company to get assigned more work, but that's normally inefficient. If we're lucky, we'll get a few jobs at a time—if things are slow, we'll get them one at a time, or none. We get paid mostly on both a piece rate and commission basis. We get paid per job and get paid a percentage of the job cost (i.e. what the client is charged). So if the average minimum cost for a midtown pickup and delivery is about \$5.50, and the average commission is 50%, then we make \$2.75 for that job. Many companies have additional costs added on for extra distance traveled ("zones"), size and weight of pickup (oversize), waiting time (if the p.u. isn't ready when we get there), etc. Some of us make another 5-10% on rain or snow days. If we kill ourselves and ride hard and fast without breaks, a number of us can make a

generalized average of about \$9 an hour, but others, who are newcomers or who aren't so lucky or adept, make \$5.00 an hour. There are also slow periods when everyone is making shit. Legendary stories about how we're all making \$100 a day ain't true. And I've never met anyone that's clearing \$18,000 a year (not that some lone lucky maniac isn't pulling that). Ya gotta take breaks in this business (plus we have to cover bike repairs and all other expenses related to the job). Last but not least, we are (on paper) "Independent Contractors": meaning we are "our own bosses," and not employees. More on that BULLSHIT later.

Bicycle messengering began as a new industry somewhere around 1972. It was started by my first boss, who later got forced out in a scandal where he was illegally charging us for workers' compensation and then pocketing the money for his coke habit. His wife took the company over—(She was formerly a biker who worked for and then married him—and then divorced him—Yo, Dallas in NYC!). There's a couple of thousand of us, almost exclusively male, 60% Black and Hispanic (mostly Black), 40% White (years ago I'd say it was more like 50-50), average ages 18-late 20s. We do have our handful of 50-70 year old heroes, and as the years go by,

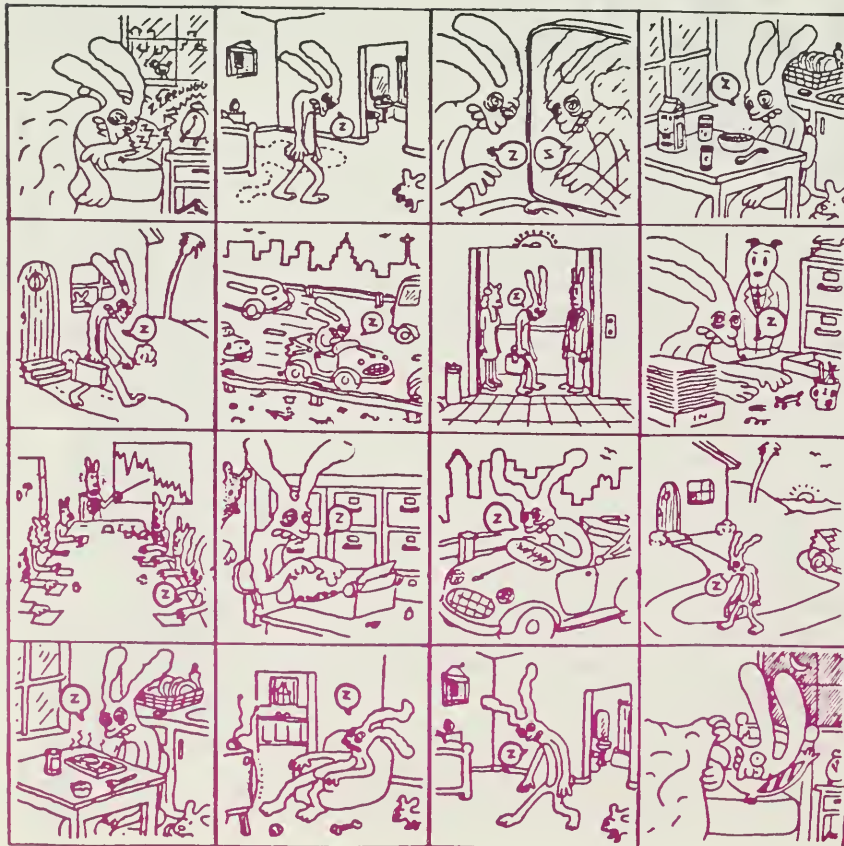
there's an increasing amount of "old-lies"—people who stick with it year after year getting into their late 20s and early 30s.

In general many of us do fit the outlaw-counterculture-street person image (with no apologies from us), that we're either romanticized or condemned for. A lot of us wouldn't be caught dead working in an office or factory (that's our preference—we ain't the snobs!) and biking is an easy place to find work. The scene is extremely transitory, companies are incessantly hiring, plus they overhire "to keep themselves covered" which fucks everyone, especially the newcomers because there's less work to go around. On the other hand it's often the only gig in town—no one else is hiring—so we end up with a crowd of poor types trying to make a buck and also some arty and intellectual sorts who can't make any bread at their profession.

All in all there's a great deal of camaraderie among us as the joints are passed and tools are shared—it is especially apparent when we rush to the side of a biker that's been hurt in an accident in this bohemia of the streets. The hellos exchanged in elevators, the whistles, the bikes, their speed, the nicknames, dread locks, colorful or torn clothes, sleek biking clothes, grimy and sweaty faces, fingerless gloves, and the superficial command of the day definitely makes bikers a "cool" group. The City is "ours" as we have an aura of strength that lacks of any trace of uneasiness or intimidation; we know who we are and where we are going and for this we reap a type of "respect." People will "stand aside" as we flash in and out of offices.

On the other hand, biking can be a grueling fuck of a job: dealing with the traffic, weather, cops, stolen bikes or bike parts, stuck up office workers and bosses, bus tailpipe in our faces, pollution, discrimination ("Are you a messenger? Please sign in before taking the elevator."), painful loads, exhaustion, and the accidents we all eventually have. The "Independent Contractor" status imposed by the companies is a joke. By claiming we are not employees, they don't have to worry about workers compensation or health plans, unemployment insurance, paid sick days (we're sort of prone to things like colds, sore throats, etc.), paid personal days (maybe our work is kind of hard and we need breaks once in a while?), holiday pay, etc., etc. Additionally, it makes us responsible for all job related gear and expenses like our bikes, bags, locks, tools, rain/snow gear, bike repairs and phone calls. It's a legalistic fiction and ruse since the real social relationship we have with the companies is like that of any other boss/worker situation. On the other hand the game is a plus for us

## Life in Hell = 1982 by Matt Groening





because they don't take taxes out of our paychecks, and our work expenses are tax deductible (although I don't know of any bikers that keep track of their phone calls!). We are not off the books though, as our companies file our wages and we're required to figure out and pay our taxes like everyone else. But it does leave the outlaws among us with some fun opportunities that the State and Feds are well aware of. For their own opportunistic reasons, they are trying to abolish the Independent Contractor bit and are battling out that gray legal area with the companies.

After all, if couriers don't pay their "dues," how will Ronnie and Nancy be able to afford to eat?!

### City Government Decides to Regulate

Last but not least is our problem with the city where our "coming of age" comes in. The spark (for the city) started when Councilwoman Carol Greitzer was almost hit by a biker. (She was unsure whether it was a messenger or not.) Now good old Carol is your prototypical snob, just the kind of person your biker loves to hate, and in this situation, the visa-versa was very important; she began a crusade to get bikers regulated and licensed. The climate was certainly ripe—it's clean up and control time in America.

In the context of an increasingly gentrified NYC, clean up and control also meant a few local specifics such as: restricting food vendors (from whom the working class gets a relatively cheap and quick lunch) from midtown Manhattan and other parts of NYC, further regulation of cabbies that would have put uniforms on them—and of course—*getting those rowdy messengers* (there are other things of course, like NYC cops cleaning up graffiti by beating to death graffiti artists like Michael Stewart).

As an aggregate we messengers mess with the clean-cut sensibilities of the new "for the rich only" urbanization. It was bicycle messengers out of that trio, though, that ended up losing. This was due in part to the fact that messengers weren't organized. Organization is difficult because of our scattered "factory" of the streets' atomization. We were easy to pick on by politicians who wanted to score political points with constituencies whose prejudicial popular wisdom (fed by media distortion and the pols) had us pegged as crazies who unendingly mow down innocent civilians.

So in 1982 along comes Greitzer with a vengeance, and the process of formulating a bill to regulate bikers began. Some of the original proposals were totally bizarre. They included the creation of a wholesale new bureaucracy to license and regulate *all* bikers, shit like having messengers pay \$1,000 (!) for a license, requiring us to have large identification signs attached to "the baskets" on either side of our bikes

I remember once asking at a meeting of 50 bike messengers, 'has anyone here *not* had an accident?' No one raised their hands."

(What a gem! The last time I saw anyone with wire baskets was in 1966 in the suburbs. No one has them in our industry!), and forcing bike couriers to keep a log of all their trips. Eventually the bill the City Council would vote on was:

- 1) We'd have to carry a special ID card
- 2) We'd have to have a license plate on our bikes
- 3) We'd have to wear a uniform jacket or T-shirt with our company's name and our license number
- 4) The companies would have to keep a record of our trips

Criminal penalties would be applied: \$100-250 fine and/or 15 days in jail for not complying.

## The One Minute Manager



### Messengers Organize Resistance

No messengers ever knew any of this shit was going on, but some of the bosses were in on the proceedings. They were opposed to the regulations because they didn't want the added bureaucracy of keeping a trip record, they would in all probability be the ones to have to issue the ID cards, etc., and they didn't

need their business getting screwed up because their workers were being stopped by the cops and maybe hauled off to precincts.

Just about one month (late Spring '84) before the City Council vote,

I noticed a newspaper article on my company's office wall concerning the regulations. I knew my boss taped it up and asked her

what the story was. She started bragging that she'd been fighting it all along with a "where were you guys" attitude. I clued her in that we were never *notified of anything by anyone*. But so much for that bull—it was *panic time!*

I immediately booked out to a phone and called a biker friend to get some organizing going; the messenger *insurrection had begun!* A bright pink leaflet by "Rough Riders" was issued entitled "WAR!!—CITY COUNCIL VS. BIKE MESSENGERS" explaining what was happening and calling for a meeting. Fifty workers came to this meeting from a group that's always been accused of being "too individualistic" and "utterly unorganizable." The "Independent Couriers Association" (ICA) was born that night ("Rough Riders" lost out as a name—oh well, too bad) which would be non-exclusionary; all messengers (foot, truck, etc.) would be welcome as would company office workers. But because of emergency circumstances regarding bikers, the flavor of organizing would orbit around us. Structurally the ICA was loose and democratic with a core of the most interested (people who regularly did the shit work, went to all meetings, etc.). Women played a role out of proportion to their small numbers in the bike messenger force. Over the next few weeks, we planned and did the works: we issued petitions, had phone-in campaigns and wrote letters to the mayor, City Council, and media—we demonstrated, lobbied, leafletted, held press conferences and chaotic "war-party" meetings of 50-100 bikers in the middle of Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park.

The heat was on; the cops were harassing the crap out of us—enforcing chickenshit laws to the max like ticketing

us for not having bells (Gimme a break—a loud “yo” or a whistle will do it, nobody needs the distraction of taking a hand off a brake to ring a bell no one may hear) or not bearing to the edge of traffic (the most dangerous place for us since people open car doors which we crash into—being “doored”—pedestrians walk in front of us from in between parked trucks where we can’t see them (crash) etc., etc.), and most importantly, for going through red lights and the wrong way down streets. Many stories circulated about bikers getting ticketed for laws they didn’t break, getting beaten up by the cops, and snagged by special police traps set up around midtown. Black couriers were getting it worse, and eventually we issued a special police complaint form for bikers to fill out. The media, of course, was uniformly opposed to us and backed the law.

Ostensibly the reason for the proposed bill was to help identify us if we hurt someone. It was also meant to deter us from busting red lights and booking the opposite way on one way streets, since if caught, we’d either have “proper ID” to get summoned (as opposed to giving a phony name and then ripping up the ticket), or else we’d have to pay stiff penalties. It all sounded sooo reasonable to a culture drowning in bureaucracy and

servility. To us it was an unnecessary, unworkable and abusive affront.

Why were we singled out to carry a special apartheid-like ID? The law did not concern all bikes, but only commercial bike riders (which besides us would also include delivery people from Chinese restaurants, drug stores, groceries, etc.—but clearly these laws would not be enforced against them) and was therefore discriminatory. The issue of hitting people was bullshit. We do often ride wild (we have to to make a buck), but hurting anyone is a rarity—we’re the “pros” out there while your normal biker is not. Statistics backed us up that we were involved in few collisions and they don’t say who’s fault those accidents were. We know damn well most accidents are the pedestrians’ fault (The New York Times that opposed us admitted that in an article). Stories abound about “those crazy riders, one of them almost hit me the other day!”—the key word (for us) being “almost.” Bicycle messengers are like any of the rest of the “controlled chaos” of NYC’s cabs, cars, pedestrians, etc.; we gotta get to where we’re goin’, and fast!, with the inter-hostility and danger among us all being mutual. Our position was: Hey, if a messenger hurts someone, let him/her be dealt with

like anyone else in a similar situation.

All counter arguments against us were in the realm of “What if”—what if we break a light, hit a pedestrian and kill them? Well how about “What if a pedestrian breaks a light, jay-walks in front of a courier, the courier swerves over but it’s into a racing truck?” Should jay-walking be forcibly outlawed? Should pedestrians have IDs tattooed on to their foreheads? Perhaps midtown should be cleared of everyone. Both the light breaking biker and pedestrian have the same attitude—“give us a break, it’s no big deal.”

Crowded,  
fast-  
paced  
urbani-



Illustration by Lance Mitchell





instance, the law said the license was to only have three digits. Add on to that the fact that there would be no central list to refer to, and you'd have a lot of bikers with the same number! Who should be responsible for getting the plates, signs, and ID cards, the companies or the riders? Were we employees? Were we Independent Contractors? In a major victory before the negotiations started they dropped the uniform bit—but we'd have to have some sort of "sign" on our backs.

We asked (satirically) "How are you gonna contact all those thousand of Chinese restaurants and groceries and tell them and their tens of thousands of commercial bike delivery people about this?" It was good watching the fools enter territory of which they knew not. The police lieutenant was the best as he kept quiet, slouched crumped up in his chair, chain smoking and smiling at the circus—"Hey lieutenant, do you think we can store the trip records (records for around 15-20 million jobs a year!) in a police warehouse or something?" "Yea, uh, I guess we got room in a corner somewhere."

Because the whole thing was so dumb and because we used our brains, we managed to get important modifications and concessions. Also, the plate under

our seats would not be the large size the city planned on which would have been hell for our thighs and crotches as we mounted and dismounted. It could be as small as possible, as long as the company name (or abbreviation) and license number can fit in one inch letters and numbers (did any of the jerks ever ride a bike?) The sign on our back could simply be another license plate attached to our bag. We wouldn't back down on our insistence though, that the whole "sign" idea had to go. The city said "they'd consider it" (bullshit). We also demanded the cops have a meeting with us to discuss the way they were fucking with us bad. That "uppityness" astounded them! They agreed to "arrange a meeting" (more bullshit). We also managed to get the implementation of the law postponed. The most important thing won was a method of circumventing the thing altogether (Sorry readers, for security reasons I'll have to ask you to use your imaginations)—we walked out of the meeting *smirking*.

And so... the charade went into effect January 85 in all its predictability. The heat from the cops had already cooled off, and the deadline for complying with the law came and went with zero fanfare. I'd say 75% *plus* of bikers aren't complying. Many are refusing and others work at companies that aren't even supplying the ID and stuff. The majority of those that do, do it only partially—they'll have the plate but not the sign, or visa-versa. Some will have a plate but keep it in their bag. I saw one plate that was on backwards!

### *The Song Remains The Same*

Bikers remain the same, busting lights and tearing down the street the wrong way, hopping sidewalks and riding in the (safe) middle of traffic. There's been no mad rush by us to install "bells" on our "killer bikes." The pavement ahead remains our prey. Gone are only the screaming headlines against us. A "terrorized" city is back to the old grind cursing us only under the breath as we do them amid the hassle and hustle but general harmlessness (as regards sheer safety) of it all, just trying to survive in a speeded-up world not made by or for the majority of any of us. And please—if you've read an inference into this article of "Fuck the cabbies," "Fuck the pedestrians," the way others say "Fuck the bikers," it wasn't meant. Not that bikers don't engage in the same infantile prejudices that others direct against us. But inane hatreds and prejudices get us nowhere. The point is to look out for and love each other dummies!

It's good to see a nicely working dialectic sometimes. The bike regulations that were meant to repress us provided the catalyst for the only sustained bicycle messenger organization ever: The ICA. Some prior attempts included: couriers at one company that was overhiring too much trying to organize a union. That attempt fell apart in a few weeks. The Service Employees International Union tried it on a city-wide basis some time ago, but after some months that too faded. Of recent memory is the Teamsters. Some messengers who had a Teamster visit were glad when the amazingly stereotypical mob type character left (reportedly he referred to the only woman courier there as "honey" and said "you fellas don't mind if I call her honey, do you?" to which one gutsy guy said "don't you think you should ask her?").

The word "union" is certainly scary to the bosses, but so do some bikers have problems with it. They fear it would mean the loss of the Independent Contractor status, and they'd have to face the regimentation of taxes being

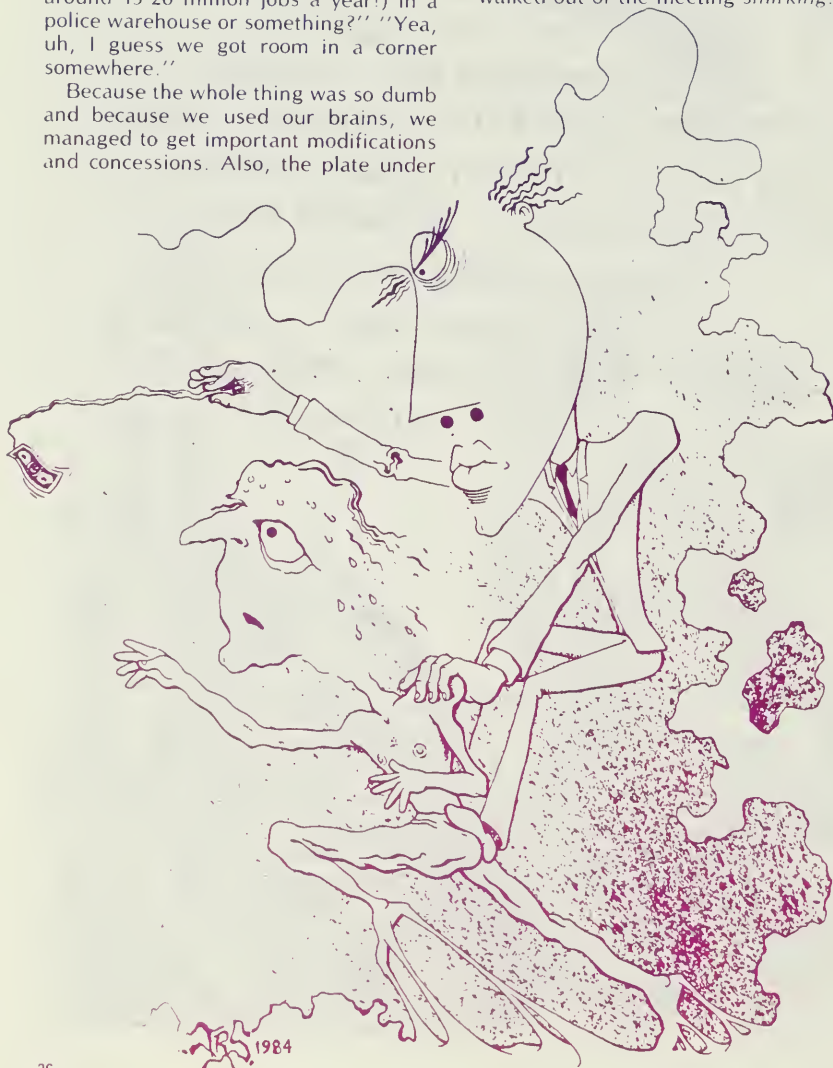


Illustration by Jim Swanson



pulled from their paychecks, they'd have to punch in and out (because some companies are lax now about your comings and goings and taking days off) and no company will pay an hourly wage similar to what can be made on commission. Besides unions have a bad name for being self-serving authoritarian bureaucracies—just the thing that many messengers dig escaping. There are examples though of other types of "Independent Contractors" that have

ers comes in. Capital is finding it much more efficient to bypass and circumvent the sometimes inefficiency of the Post Office and use the immediacy of such as bike messengers, private package carriers, and machinery that can zap text and graphics from one locale to another in seconds (Ironically less work—in terms of increased speed, efficiency and agility—often means more work here as peddling is harder than hoofing it, and because we can do more jobs per hour,

points of a future rebellion against this dollar- and object-centric society, and for a people- and life-oriented one? Imagine a coalition of the street (couriers) and office (secretaries, computer programmers, etc.)—Yo! It's the Revolution! OK, OK, so it's silly fantasy, but such wild imaginings have a habit of becoming very real in history a la France '68, Poland's Solidarity, or say Black insurrection in South Africa. If the farm-workers out west could get organized,

**"Bicycle messengers as a group aren't exactly your young Republican types and would make an interesting addition to a backward, comatose and dying American labor movement."**

successfully bargained with employers without losing their status. In any case most all couriers agree that we need our own group; we have a legitimate basis to organize for our welfare.

So the ICA lives on. Whether they can get the messenger regulations junked remains to be seen. They hold regular meetings, publish a newsletter and are concerned with everything from potholes to the lack of workers' compensation some riders are faced with. A grant has been received, a messenger concert/bash is planned and the ICA has even gotten some bike shops to give discounts to its card carrying members. The "unorganizable" have remained organized—an ironic anomaly in the age of Reagan

then we are gonna do more jobs per hour. The same goes for the secretary and the word processor vs. the secretary and typewriter—because stuff can be typed quicker and more efficiently with the former, then that secretary is gonna be loaded with that much more work.)

That which is so important to the circuitry of Capital can also be its short circuitry. Neither messenger companies nor their clients can store away messenger runs for instance, like a coal company might hoard coal in anticipation of a strike. Any job action by couriers would have an immediate debilitating effect on those concerned. We can cut power off at its source and sever completely the lives of transmission

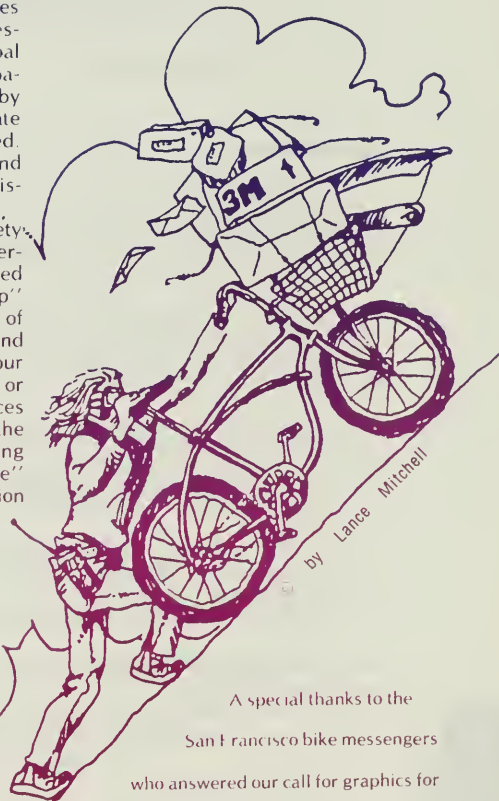
why couldn't we? (Our social statuses are quite similar in ways.) Still, I have to smile everytime someone says to me "Ya know, it'll probably be the bicycle messengers who'll overthrow the fucking government." But what if...?

In the meantime you can catch me plowing blacktop—and hating and loving every second of it.

#### *Theoretical Insurrectional Addendum*

Bicycle messengers as a group aren't exactly your young Republican types and would make an interesting addition to a backward, comatose and dying American labor movement. Delivery services seem to be a growing industry amid the withering of your more traditional blue collar staples such as steel. Information as such has become a highly valued commodity and bicycle couriers, along with others such as computer workers, make up some of the labor of that circuitry. The narrowing of gaps in space by speeding up time is what makes your messenger on a ten-speed hurtling across midtown or your relative Federal Express efficiency attractive to a capitalism pathologically hungry for profits that depends on getting things done as quickly as possible. This is where the pivotal importance of information processors, circulators and transport work-

Why not? We owe nothing to a society that would burn out its young on danger-ridden streets in an envelope of polluted dirty orange haze no matter how "hip" our job may appear to be (the world of Appearances being what helps con and control us as we unendingly accept our daily oppressions). Death in industry or death in war—these are the choices America the Beautiful offers. Who the fuck needs it? Wouldn't it be interesting if "ignorant" and "unorganizable" messengers might be among the ignition



A special thanks to the San Francisco bike messengers who answered our call for graphics for Road Warriors." We always welcome more contributions, so send 'em in!

## OCOTLAN

Mulatto girl on the bus to Ocotlan  
slowly reading the romantic  
comic-book novel about  
the pale poor pretty young woman  
who advances in the world of the city  
through clever secretarial skills  
till a rich executive falls in love with her.

Brujo in the plaza of Ocotlan  
in a white cowboy shirt and black aura  
selling holy crosses in white envelopes:  
you soak the cross in water overnight  
sprinkle the corners of your house,  
if anyone wishes you evil  
it returns double unto him.

Dancer with his hands tied behind him  
led to a tree and carved in stone  
pierced with obsidian for pleasure  
song-scroll issuing from his mouth like smoke,  
like the call-letters of the revolution.

Young soldier with a machine-gun  
guarding the crossroads,  
rags of plastic whip in the wind  
from every thorn, a thin trail  
worn by bare feet leads from the highway  
to the shacks of the very poor.

John Oliver Simon

## MELANCHOLY BABY FUNNIES

My name is Eddy Paris  
Eddy Paris in Newstown  
Because i walk around the dark canyons of streets  
Surrounded by towers of television sets

Eddy Parris in Televisiontown  
In all the skyscrapers all the windows are television sets  
And all i've got is a coat, five bucks  
And a cigarette

But somehow sometime it's always my show  
I give the news, i do the weather  
I report the basketball scores from Mundelein  
I do an editorial on the Shah of Edgewater

The city seems no more than a billion windows to me  
A billion projections of the broken down  
Facets of my prim ambitions  
Your Eddy Big Paris Brother with an eye up/on your sleeve

And when it's not me it's just somebody else  
It really doesn't matter  
Look! even now there's a documentary of some fetish-suckling  
pre-industrial, mud-a-mistic  
tribe in cold borneo  
on TV

But the streets are just as 'laissez faire' there  
As here, and just as thick and tense  
Or deep and dense  
Why dont you just choose your window then live in it?

Sincerely yours,  
Edward Paris

## IN NAKED CITY

- 1) Death isn't funny
- 2) Orgasms are boring
- 3) Someone's been reading my mail  
the heart races  
the skin flushes  
the skin squirms inside itself  
like a billion nematodes

The smug face contains respectively  
bloom  
& death

I lit a cigarette  
& thought about the tube steak getting lathered  
in alleyways  
in backrooms of naked city  
In naked city  
something spreads from the groin like an oil slick.

I pretend to read a magazine  
i'm really driven  
to a frenzy by my wilted bedsheets  
& the rhapsodic woman-image  
raven-haired  
she rides  
on my hips with half  
closed eyes.

Shall i masturbate?  
with a cut of wet meat tonight?  
or should i use cold cream?  
should i squirt it on the wall?  
or catch it in my hand?

Shall i smear it all over my skin?

It's fun,  
it's like riding a mule.  
Will i come  
in convulsions  
that crumble my bones?

It's all in your technique,  
Some will want to splatter their balls  
like coconut shells  
between pavingstones  
& they'll get off only once at that  
in naked city.

Carl Watson



## THE BLESSING

I'm now able to sit up in a chair,  
and on good days I can comb my hair,  
(that is, if someone is helping me).

There will always be these memories  
of the incident, but to this very day,  
I haven't a single regret.

Who would have thought that I'd land  
on the back of a Madison Avenue advertising  
executive bending down to pick up a quarter  
he saw lying on the sidewalk!

Anyone would tell you that the odds of  
surviving a fall from the top of the Empire  
State Building is virtually impossible. But  
here I am, and things couldn't be better!

I'm now in the employ of the advertising  
agency where the executive used to work.  
His widow and children are all doing fine,  
living quite well off the checks from the  
insurance.

I'm doing fine, working exclusively with  
my tongue, taking on stamps and envelopes  
at such a rate that my accomplishments are  
getting to be known worldwide.

There is already talk about turning my  
life into a movie for TV.

And unlike before, women now smile and  
say hello to me by name...something I've  
been dreaming of all my life!

Jeffrey Zable

## A SMILING HERPES

First  
a little blister on  
my lip  
then

splitting open to  
deposit its virtue over  
my jaw &

growing bigger to  
fill with blood &  
scab over

(every  
three months or so to  
make its ugly  
appearance this

way) &  
it stays there glorifying  
my face for

weeks  
broadcasting  
my affliction throughout  
city & state:

"Take heed!" it wails.  
"This man has herpes!  
His face is a running  
virulence!  
Do not touch!"

coming  
out every three months like  
**The Quarterly of Disgust &**  
nothing I can do to  
stop its publication  
like

the flow of the Ganges of  
a deathly spew from  
Vesuvius all so  
beyond  
my control  
!

Fritz Hamilton

## PAY DAY

There's only three things in life  
that you need to keep in store:  
What you do, what you're paid  
and what you're paid for

I went up to heaven  
had to talk to the man  
I walked up to the gate  
and I held out my hand

I said "I'm here to collect  
my due and my debt"  
He said "I'm sorry kid,  
but that's all that you get"

I said "But sir, I got  
three kids and a wife"  
(I could not believe  
I had been fired from life)

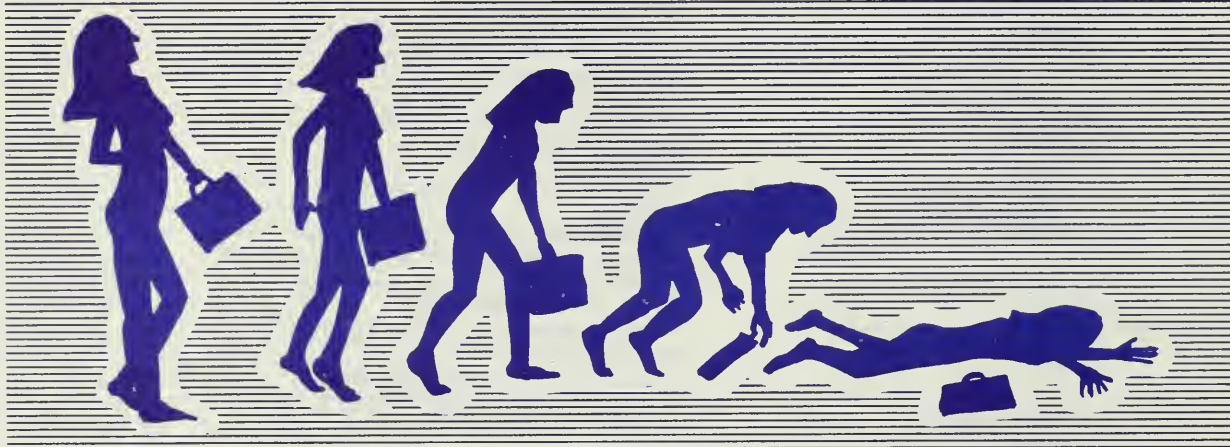
"So could you answer one question,  
what was wrong with my work?"  
He said "There weren't nothing wrong  
'cept for one little quirk

Here, allow me to adjust your brain a little  
There, now doesn't that feel better?"

I said "Thanks alot"  
and I turned towards the door  
It's strange, I can't remember  
what I came here for

Valerie Warden

# 925 CRAWL



by Kathleen Hulser

**T**he clock hands are stuck in molasses. The day crawls forward on its knees, me, too, on my knees with face pushed into the carpet. Red eyes, ripped cuticles, parched lips, a succubus in the corporate bosom.

Here with the Brokers of Record, insurances and reinsurances, secondary sales of risk, writs underwritten in London and Munich, Los Angeles and Brussels. Risk management squares off in the ring with a middle-weight claims contender. Dams and dikes put their shoulder to disasters. Future picture: an acid rain of litigation: a million cyclones, Bhopals, court days and damages.

The workforce. Men in the sandbox, dirtying their suits so cleaners in Westchester and Jersey can send their offspring to college. Paper pushers without portfolio, they shoulder their brooms and march off to lengthy high-proof lunches. Grey cake in the brain, like grey water stuck in the drain loop. Vacation days, floating days, sick days, personal days, holidays are the Liquid Plumber of the corporation.

"Oh say did you see in the New York Times, the shot of the panting dog, the lovely murderer's accomplice freed, the four figure toilet seat on board The Enterprise?" The day's exchanges trickle, a babbling brook of little import and many pebbles, words and pleasantries trip delightfully down the stream. The wind whistles in the towers, echoes in the file cabinets. Designed to soothe employees with white noise? Or to drive them in silent screams to sealed windows, there to claw at vertical blinds, rattle the slats?

I continue my crawl past miles of business bunions. Toes wrapped and strangled in navy blue supp-hose. Toes painted and proffered in Italian sandals. Toes curled by their room without a view. Toes dreaming of the scrape of tree bark, the slimy handshake of seaweed. Toes soon to be flayed alive in a high-heeled trudge to the copyroom.

Two-faced reproduction. Girls play the xerox control panel, stacking high copy scores. "Beware of industrial sabotage" warns the **Employee Heed This** sign. A closed circuit camera over the boss machine fails to spot the mole hiding in the excess paper tray. The mole will make off with priceless client lists, "eyes only" memoranda, corporate love letters, A to Z tax evasion plans. I cross paths with the happily laden mole off to tell the competitors, the Russians, Uncle Sam. Off to cash in on the free market. Off to confirm the importance of being earnest in business.

I crawl past a flotilla of seats, their hulls stamped in code, stenciled in black and red: "Property of K Corporation, Inc." The secret crawlers are cryptographers reading between the lines. "Rumplestiltskin is my name. This way to paradise. Two somersaults to a fine season. Seven years of fat and forget the lean." Hieroglyphics are refreshers on a long crawl. Good humor magnetizes me, I'm trailing a wedding-can train of paper clips. I push through the center of a seven-mile reel of staple wire to demag myself, creating a current that frizzles databases on 40 floors.

Another world. Soap watchers congregate in the mail-room behind the ten-foot corrugated rolls of Softee-send. Front desk personnel listen to video radio on tv wrist-



watches. Faces and features are remote squiggles but domestic trauma squeaks loud and clear. Hooked on weepies, the soapers join a nationwide synchronous moan of communal catharsis.

Fueling. Pinched waists, narrow sleeves on women's suits, high heels, slim calves. Secretaries don't eat. "Oh, no, thanks, I'm on a diet. My skirts are tight, just tea and yogurt for me." But all day as I crawl, a rain of crispy crunchy junky crumbs hails down on my head. Squirrelled in file cabinets, desk drawers, tote bags are innumerable cello-wrapped treats: salted, glazed, BTUed and BTAed for freshness, filling empty secretarial tummies during empty secretarial day shifts. The building vibrates with a low-level nosing hum, like a division of termites munching towards Armageddon. Secretaries with pearly teeth crunching at 9 am, 11 am, noon time, 2, 4 and 6, whisking telltale crumbs to the floor, deftly stashing Oreos beneath steno-pads, tortilla chips behind the typing stand.

The man by Folon dribbles Beaujolais on his tie. Ruddy wrinkles roll from forehead to neck, disappearing into the white moat that pens in his jowls. His businessman's neck slopes from collar to barrel chest and his arms are webbed to the elbow. If pushed down a sandpit, he would roll like a Michelin on holiday; if started down the Alps he would launch an avalanche to make the cuckoo-clockers tell tales for generations. Stuffed on cocktail meatballs, chunks of Swiss, bite-sized quiche, and beef fondue at 5, he jovially proceeds to fettucini alfredo, tournedos and baba au rhum at 9.

Maintenance. Courtesy coffee shoots caffeine through sluggish veins every morning. I crawl by coffee filter set-ups on waxed counters, past shaker jars of petroleum distillate that passes for morning moo. Loyalty to mid-east client oilocracy proved in small, thoughtful details. I go right on by to the lunch table, past the throbbing toe of the coffee lady. No health shoe has room for the unruly swellings of service feet. She's off her feet, as every morning, studying her "Powerful Words" booklet. She's absorbed. I wait to hear a powerful word deployed. Will a grip on "bilateral transaction equilibrium" propel her to the top? Will executive pumps ease her corns?

Executive hands wash executive fingers with executive rings in the executive washroom. The sirocco strikes the East Coast, a droplet-conscious municipality hooks up the Hudson to the faucets. Executive crud washes executive hands. Croakers flap in the soap dishes. An eel hugs the urinal head.

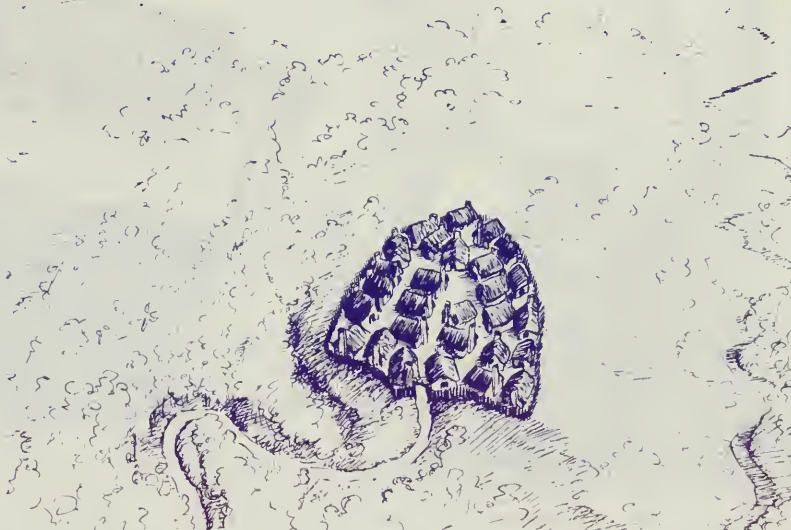
I crawl under lawns of solemn oak, scraping my eyebrows on executive desk

handles. I surface for fresh air, a peep out the window. Businessmen scowl as they cross the street to avoid hotel strikers. Pot and pan reggae bounces off the naves of Radio City. Maids and busboys, cooks' helpers and dustforces stick pins in the old contracts and invoke juju mischief on hotel management. As mounties ride the picketline, the horses ring the Hilton, the Ritz, the Barbizon with guest-repellent. Businessmen scrape their shoes, and walk on to sit with their knishes by scorched ornamental pools, lawfully drained.

The pool rimsters lick the final sludge from lip edges and fingertips. The daytime turns towards afternoon. To soothe my hands and knees after hours of carpet burn, I toboggan down a blind. I plot my passage home: aiming high for style and comfort. A grey bump under desk edge is my ally; an abandoned, not just temporarily parked, ball of Doublemint provides a practical liaison. Briefly wedded to the hardening grey twinner, I snuggle on the sole of an elegant pump and limo uptown.

Drawings by Jean-Francois Bachelier

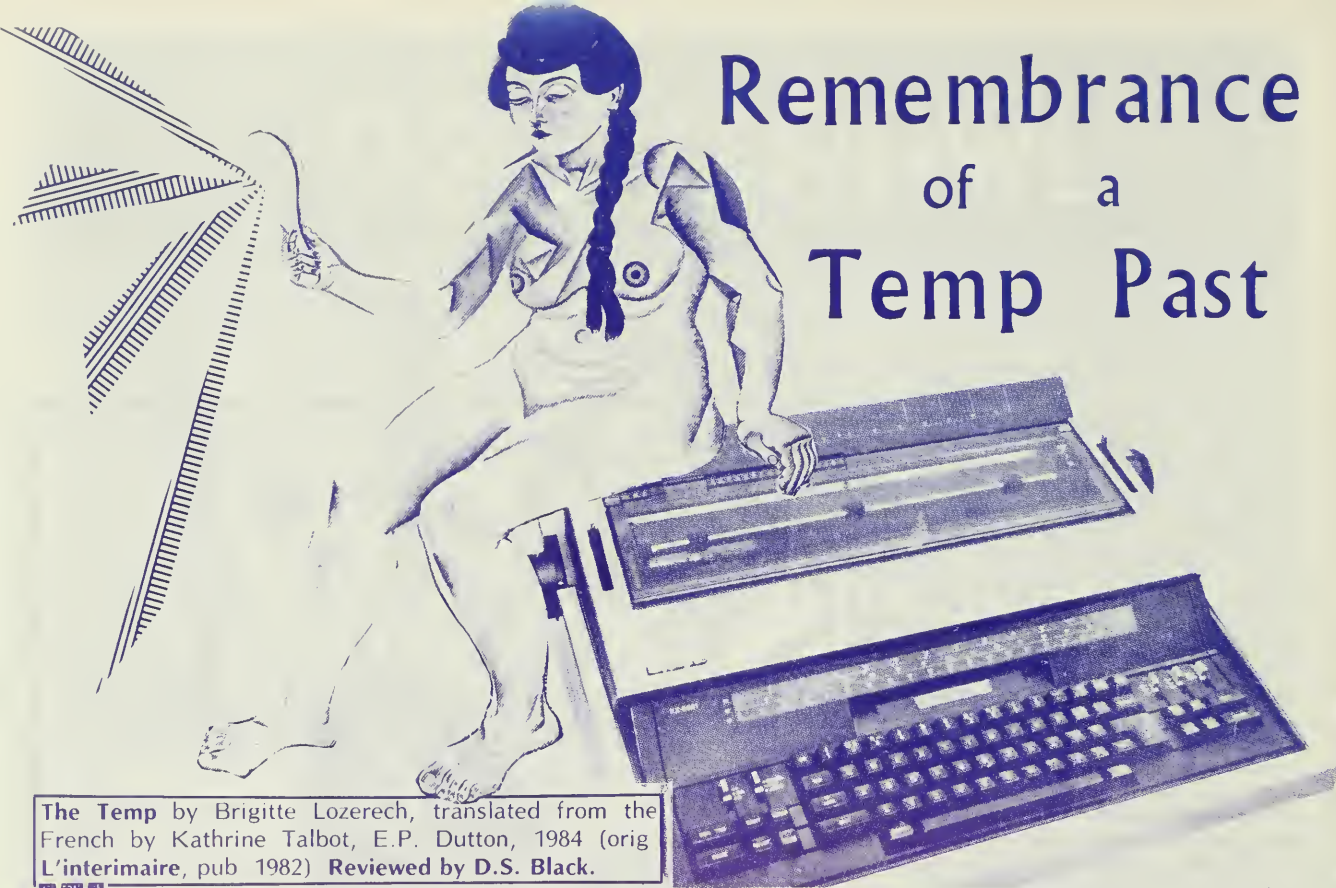
## FROM THE BIRTH OF VILLAGES...



## ... TO THE BIRTH OF GREEN SPACES.



# Remembrance of a Temp Past



**The Temp** by Brigitte Lozerech, translated from the French by Kathrine Talbot, E.P. Dutton, 1984 (orig L'interiminaire, pub 1982) **Reviewed by D.S. Black.**

**W**herever I go to work as a temp, I take a good look around to see whether the staff can use the telephone. I watch closely, ask offhand questions, make a first attempt to see how people react, then get hold of a telephone, not necessarily of my own, but one where I can make outside calls in private. They are like the calls from a submarine cut off from the world, as I am cut off for eight hours a day among people I have nothing in common with, at the beck and call of a superior.

The "Minerva" temporary agency described in *The Temp*, though French, is basically identical to any here. Office bosses play the same games with their employees: paternalistic abuse; the constant threat of arbitrary termination; continual reminders that as a temp one is in a work force without rights, treated as though part of a superfluous population.

What I fear most is to be one of a crowd, an ideology, a fashion, a herd pouring out of the same subway station, entering identical doors in a row of houses in one street, climbing stairs and walking through a door, saying good morning to colleagues and sitting down at a desk for eight hours. This seems to me so profoundly sad that I refuse to be part of it. When I do find myself in this situation it's only by chance, and I can say, "I'm only a stand-in. I'm a temp."

Despite the title, *The Temp* does not primarily concern itself with the modern office and the already well-documented lot of those stuck with the mechanical tasks of

dictation, filing, reception, etc. This book is instead a dilation and curettage profile of a person who has settled into an obscure half-life of internal exile. Being a temp is for her the perfect cover, a faultless way to remain publicly silent in the din of the demanding world. She is so deep in the abyss, so utterly dehumanized, that she can calmly narrate the terror of her ways without a trace of self-pity.

Pointed in its anatomization of the loner, it brings to mind another very successful first novel: Sartre's *Nausea*, published 50 years ago.

*I've never been able to understand what's required of me, and even today I haven't become part of office life. Nothing about it seems important, there's no way in which I'm indispensable. Nothing gives me the feeling that makes me go home proud and erect.*

*The Temp*, however, is not without hope, for all its occupational gloom. The story is loosely based on the life of its author, Ms. Brigitte Lozerech. The eponymous temp (also named "Brigitte") is so self-concealed as to seem traumatized, which in fact she is, still shellshocked by childhood.

The jobs she has are of remote interest to her; as with many office drudges, her real priorities lie elsewhere. The extent of her dissociation is unusual, even alarming, to the point where her feverish confessions are as rarefied as air from an iron lung, or "the calls from the submarine" referred to earlier. This book traces her recovering a past as painful as any rite of passage; it is the intimate record



of a person whose secrets have isolated her, but at the same time are all that can save her.

*The thought was like a black veil falling between me and the future. I was unable to envisage the period separating childhood from old age, and found it impossible to fill the gap.*

*Is that why I am a temp? The present has caught me unprepared, I never planned for it, I've got nothing to fill it with. It frightens me.*

As well it should. If growing up wasn't agony enough, the present is rife with threats, complications—closing in on all sides like a tomb.

Growing up: large family with indifferent parents, a father she craved greater intimacy with who was preoccupied with the large things in life he read in *Le Monde*; eight siblings, most of them male, most of whom took advantage of her sexually; a sense of smallness that grew over the years so that finally the only real world seemed that of the written word.

*I would have liked to have shown her something of my own private life, but I didn't have one, and since I didn't want anyone to know this, I filled the gap with words and beguiling phrases.*

Unlike Sartre's Roquentin, she is able to draw strength and grow as she writes,

though as with everything it's tinged with a mordant self-doubt ("I do nothing but cut myself off and make marks on paper").

She makes the acquaintance of a sympathetic publisher—the Great Man—who critiques her work in a way that does for her what she's missed in ten years of psychoanalysis.

That she's lived too much outside herself is evident right from the start. The Great Man calls her on this, perceiving real talent through her many layers of numbness and dissociation. He challenges her to settle old accounts, come to terms with herself, and thus write better.

To work it out, she has to let long suppressed memories surface, and face her scar tissue of memory, hazed by the years of sexual abuse. She does this through writing, while continuing to temp. Through literary exorcism, she finds a handle on the thing she's kept from everyone (including the therapists): the revolting memory of her lubricious youth. In doing so, she makes her "final [confession], giving birth at last to [the] secret."

These flashes from the past illuminate her development as a progression in the logic of alienation. As an extreme example (or product) of trends in our



time, the main character and the writer in this book—Brigitte, clearly distinguished, at one point, from her model/creator Brigitte Lozerech—finds herself perversely perfect for a niche on the margins of modern life—a misfit, in other words.

The reader must accept the verdict of the Great Man (to which Brigitte concurs) that her early works were incomplete, scrapbook affairs which served only to empower her to her next and first successful novel, the book in hand, *The Temp*.

Ironically, as her writing improves, she becomes more of an asset to her employer, who subsequently offers her a permanent position. When she demurs, she is terminated, perhaps for ingratitude.

The Great Man challenges her to leave the past well enough alone and focus on herself and the present, to attend to the spindled, sometimes mutilated film through which she sees herself:

"Let's hear you tell us what you do."

"Me?" I said. "I don't do anything. I'm a temp."

He looked at me with interest. "A temp," he said. "That's not nothing. Now we're getting somewhere."

As she writes the book, she's assailed by images from a fragmented past.



Collages by Lucius Cabins



It seemed that I still had to learn everything about myself and my life. I had to go back in time, but all around me there was nothing but fog. The outlines of my brothers and my cousins became vague. I could no longer tell them apart and saw them only from the waist down. It seemed to me as if I saw a film unroll itself before me in the fog, a blurred film so damaged in parts that yards and yards of it were quite useless, and long stretches of it were missing.

To work on her new novel she cuts herself off from all traditional ties. She moves and does not give her family her new address. Her lifestyle as a temp is perfectly suited to severing these few connections, and with a small advance from the Great Man, she can be selective about her assignments.

While she applies herself to "the jumbled alphabet of the keyboard" on her own terms, she recognizes both the occupational and in part deliberate tenuousness of all her relationships; in every way she is a temp.

Though her perspective is fearful and confined, she writes about it in language beautiful and precise; her typewriter must be fitted with a jeweller's eye off the dissecting table. Clinically, she records the fallout levels of a nuclear family, and details the familiar (though far from trite) denial of herself as an individual, thinking reed, in the office of today. Temping her way through these modern chambers of horror makes her conscious and alive—among other things, this woman is a survivor.

American readers might not see any political relevance to a story of this subjectivity. One may sympathize with Brigitte (and even find her inspiring), but to take her as a paradigm for emulation will probably occur to few. It is certainly extreme for an office worker to be so alienated as to have no friends at all. And if someone's had a rough childhood, so what? Haven't we all? Creative expression is not a form of catharsis available to or even desired by all. Since Joseph Heller's bleak 1974 novel, *Something Happened*, the drift in mainstream American culture has been towards a wry, accepting view of "capitalist realism" (the classic success story in which boy meets bank). The film *9 to 5* paid lip service to some popular images of enlightened reform, but was at core an affirmation of what it pretended to critique [see PW #1].

Americans can't bear too much reality.

*The Temp* is a stark selfportrait of an otherwise heavily armored, closeted clerical worker. Her experience issues as notes from a low-rise underground on the outskirts of Paris. In its lapidary perfection, exploring one person's

psyche, strengths and insecurities, and how all this is reflected in her past and immediate environment, it falls square in the tradition of the European *Bildungsroman*—an effective write of passage.

Whether one temps or not, it is of interest more than just as a tale of toil—it's a tale of our times, when business is business (and there's no business like no business).

When people ask me why I'm still a temp though I'm over thirty, I say it's because I lack ambition. My only ambition is to write this book, to find my own truth in it and exorcise my secret.

Whether or not the book sells, I'll remain a temp.

Is she still a temp? Ms. Lozerech's book was an "immediate sensation" and #1 bestseller on publication in France, three years ago. At least as a temp she has writing she "can fall back on." The boss that smirked condescendingly when she told of her need to write has been put in his place. Though parents and bosses everywhere are loath to encourage this, or any creative outlet, in Brigitte Lozerech, we are fortunate to find someone whose ambition and talent have transmuted the stuff of daily death and past pain into true literature.

"What I fear most is to be one of the crowd, an ideology, a fashion, a herd pouring out of the same subway station, entering identical

doors in a row of houses in one street, climbing stairs and walking through a door, saying good morning to colleagues and sitting down at a desk for eight hours.



Apologies to Carlo Carra, Joan Miro, and Paul Delvaux, whose paintings were collaged for this article





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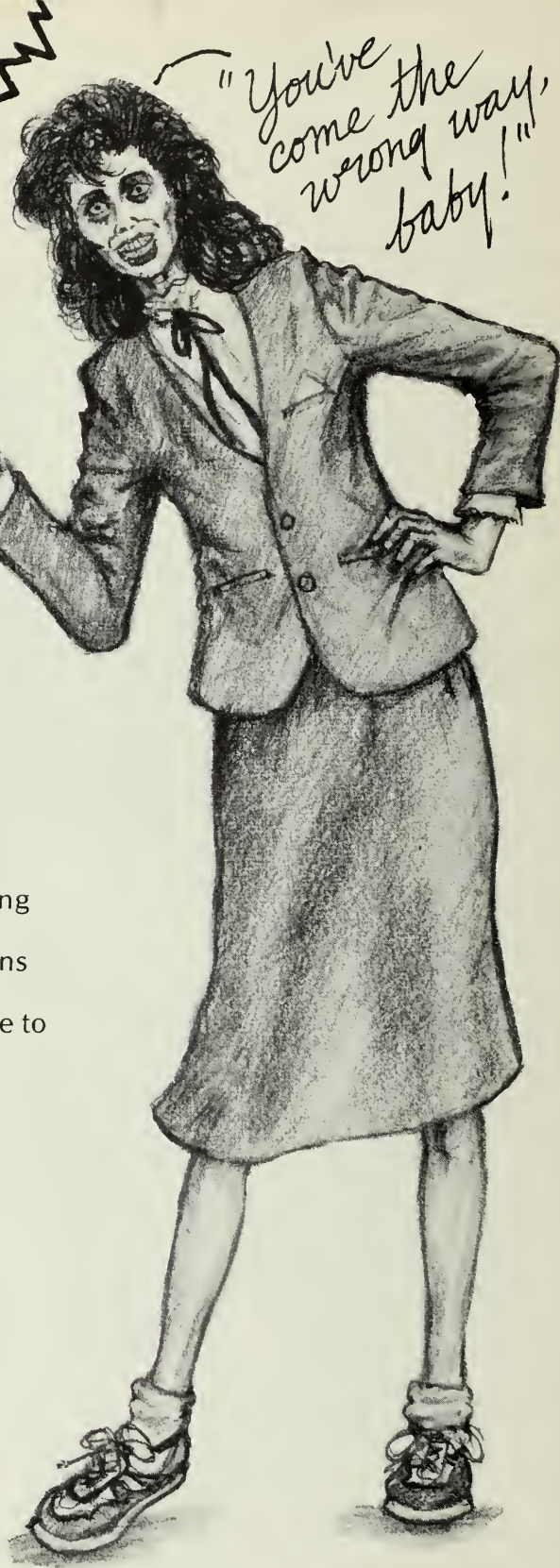


Illustration by Louis Michaelson